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The imperfect woman.  
Femininity and British Cinema, 1945-1958.

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy.

Melinda Mash

Middlesex University

January 1996.

## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates the reconstruction of femininity in Britain in the post-war period (1945-1958). This is carried out through an examination of the socio-economic and cultural formation of the period, contemporaneous cultural commentaries, contemporary critical writing about the cinema audience, and selected British films from the period, including a detailed study of *Yield to the Night* (1956). The thesis utilises a range of theoretical approaches to these issues - film theory, feminist theory and epistemology, social and oral history, discourse theory and textual analysis. The methodological framework of the thesis reflects its feminist concerns and, in turn, engages with debates within feminist theory concerning questions of methodology and epistemology.

Accordingly, the first chapter outlines the methodological framework of the thesis as well as situating it in relation to published work in similar areas. In addition, this chapter introduces the themes of the subsequent chapters and clarifies certain key terms used throughout. The second chapter concentrates on the socio-economic and cultural formation of the period 1945-1958 and argues that this period is marked by particular discursive formations - 'Austerity', 'Affluence' and 'Americanisation'. These are then discussed in relation to the ways that they are gendered and thus promote prescribed forms of femininity and womanliness. Chapter three focuses on the presentation of the period in terms of women's experiences of the time. This is achieved through an analysis of the tensions between domesticity, women's entry into the labour market and the discursive pressures on women at this time. Chapter four extends the arguments presented in the previous chapters with reference to selected films from the period - *Dance Hall* (1950), *Turn the Key Softly* (1953) and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957), which is discussed with reference to *Brief Encounter* (1945). Chapter five analyses two film publications from the period - *Penguin Film Review* (1946-1949) and *The Picturegoer* (1931-1960) - in order to establish the discursive construction of the female cinema audience. Finally, Chapter six is an in-depth analysis of *Yield to the Night* (1956) with respect to critical and audience reception of the film and the issue of the construction of 'Affluent femininity.'



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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction, methodology and the process of research

This thesis is concerned with representations of women in selected British films from the 1940s and 1950s, the female audience of those films, and a particular historical and social context for femininity in Britain in the post-war years. It assumes a set of relations between these terms, but not their identity. The focus of this project is on the ways in which a range of discursive formations<sup>1</sup> produced specific representations of femininity in Britain throughout the period 1945-1958. My intention is to demonstrate how these discursive (and social, and cultural) femininities were constructed according to specific forms of behaviour and presentation, ascribed to women at this time in an attempt to deal with the 'problem' of femininity through the representation of an 'appropriate' or 'proper' womanliness.<sup>2</sup> This assertion is based on an hypothesis: that through an

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<sup>1</sup>Discursive formation here refers to the methodological framework formulated by Michel Foucault, see especially Foucault, 1985 (1974). In this framework, investigation focuses on the construction of systems of power/knowledge relations in order to highlight the ways that networks of discourse(s) effect the production of power through the 'creation' of knowledge about a given 'object'. For the purposes of this project, the focus of analysis is on the ways that notions of a *preferred womanliness* were produced through a range of discourses, such that it is possible to identify the contours of femininities in Britain throughout the period 1945-58, and to see the ways that the production of 'knowledge' about femininity at this time is related to the particular social, ideological and cultural formation of the period.

<sup>2</sup>It is important here to clarify my use of *womanliness*. By this I mean the ways that femininity was 'worked upon' by the dominant culture and *transformed* into a culturally and historically specific set of behaviours and 'modes of being'

examination of representations of femininity in certain British films produced between 1945 and 1958 it is possible to identify **both** a coherence and consistency in dominant notions of femininity and womanliness, **and** a certain shift in sanctioned models of presentation and behaviour which are closely linked to the changing social and economic formations of the period. British Cinema registers these seismic shifts in the socio-economic, and makes visible the cultural and ideological work of the cinema through narratives and representations.

As an (interdiscursive) system of popular representation, meaning and value, British Cinema offers a productive resource for the analysis of gender and

---

which reflected that culture's *ideas about* who and what women were, and which were 'appropriate' or 'proper' ways for women to behave. Of course, this is not to suggest that 'femininity' is simply innocent, raw material; it too is an effect of dominant cultural attitudes towards women. I use the term 'femininity' to refer to the way that, at this particular time and in this particular culture, sexual difference was organised around 'taken-for-granted' assumptions that women were heterosexual, married or wanting to be, and mothers or wanting to be. By womanliness I mean the ways that this femininity was then re-produced according to particular notions about appropriate or 'correct' **ways of being a proper woman**. In addition to these two terms I want to make it clear that by 'women' I do not intend to rely on an unproblematic assumption that women were at this time socially undifferentiated. Nevertheless, this was a period of relative social and racial homogeneity. In particular, my focus is on the translation of working-class femininity into an 'appropriate womanliness'. When I refer to 'women' I adhere to a notion of women as historically situated, concretely existing individuals, formed by, but in part negotiating, a variety of discursive pressures on them as women in the period. The different inflections that relate to 'women' are expanded upon in Chapter 5 in relation to the precise ways that critical discourse on the cinema audience attached specific meanings to the 'feminine audience'. In respect of this, I have found the following work productive: Andreas Huyssen's essay "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" (1991: 44-62); Teresa de Lauretis's formulation of the different registers in which 'femininity' is produced in Western cultures from her book *Alice Doesn't. Feminism. Semiotics. Cinema*. (1984: 1-11), and Denise Riley's book *Am I That Name?* (1988, especially 1-17; 96-114).

representation in the post-war period of reconstruction. Not only was cinemagoing a main leisure activity in this period,<sup>3</sup> it was also a chief site in which audiences engaged with texts that represented both themselves and the national culture. My emphasis, however, is on a 'cultural studies' type analysis of the contours of femininity during the period, rather than on a textual analysis of British films 'as films'. If it is accepted that the years following World War II were instrumental in shaping the cultural, ideological and social tenor of Britain up until the mid- to late-1960s then it is possible to argue that a focus on this period enables us to understand more clearly the formation of a modern, British, post-war femininity, and that certain British films from the period offer very particular insights into this process.

Film is not here conceptualised as a cultural product that simply 'reflects' society, nor does it 'create' social norms. Rather, the approach adopted here is allied to what has been called a 'double focus' approach to Cinema:

'On the one hand ...to provide an explanation of why the films assumed the ideological characteristics they did...how they were shaped and influenced by the context in which they were produced...On the other hand [to discuss] "effects", that is to say how the films themselves were "effective" in shaping and influencing ideological attitudes and perceptions during this period. This is a concern which is interrelated with, but nonetheless distinct

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<sup>3</sup> The period between the mid-1940s to the late-1950s is marked by high, if declining, rates of cinema attendance. In 1946 for instance, cinema attendances were 1,640 million and more than four-fifths of the population visited the cinema at least once during the year. By 1956 annual cinema attendance was still significantly high but had dropped to 1,101 millions, and by 1960 stood at 501 millions. See Docherty, Morrison & Tracey 1987: 14-29, and the Appendix in Curran and Porter, 1983: 372-82.



from, the first.' (Hill, 1986: 177)<sup>4</sup>

Whilst this project is partially an engagement with existing texts that focus on film and context, film and 'representations of women', it is also grounded in debates in feminist theory and epistemology. Thus, the precise questions being posed are not ones that relate uniquely to films and cinema per se, but to the ways in which a singular 'object' - *woman* - was produced in a variety of discursive terms. The films discussed are not conceived as the site on which meanings of femininity were produced and circulated, nor are they looked at in isolation, but seen as *elements of* a process in which particular meanings are *attached* to a femininity that was produced through a range of related, but distinct, fields of discursive activity. In this sense, the films contained in this thesis are exemplifications of the confluence of a variety of notions about gendered subjectivities that can be located in and understood in relation to a range of 'utterances' from outside of the cinematic realm, but that nevertheless impact upon it in a variety of ways. Another way of putting this is that what I am interested to demonstrate is the ways that film functions as part of a system that 'creates' particular significations of femininity - how and where, if you like, the 'meanings' of femininity were produced at this particular time and how we can see British films as part of the production and

---

<sup>4</sup>Hill's study of British Cinema between 1956 and 1963 has been influential in this project. This influence stems not so much from the analytical framework that Hill adopts, which focuses on film as text, but from the approach he takes, in particular, the contextualisation he presents in his first Chapter (1986: 5-34). This draws together a variety of sources to produce a rich sense of the social and ideological tenor of the period, and was instrumental in shaping the principle themes for this project.

circulation of these meanings.

Of course, it would be legitimate to argue that the focus on femininity throughout this period is symptomatic of what might be called a 'crisis in masculinity' and that the various attempts to contain and limit the possible range of roles, positions and representations of women throughout this time reflect the attempts of a fractured and unsettled 'patriarchal' society to re-establish an 'appropriate' masculinity following the dislocations of World War II. This is, of course, accepted and acknowledged, and here it may be necessary to say something about the nature of historical enquiry in relation to models of 'women's' and 'gender' studies.

Feminist debates have been concerned with the theoretical and methodological implications of the production of a women's history (which attempts to 'redress the balance' and place women within the boundaries of existing historical frameworks), as opposed to gender history, which

"...insists on the need to examine gender concretely and in context and to consider it a historical phenomenon, produced, reproduced, and transformed in different situations and over time. This is at once a familiar posture for a historian and a profoundly new way of thinking about history. For it calls into question the reliability of terms that have been taken as self-evident by historicizing them. The story is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they have reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed." (Scott, 1988: 6)

This thesis, too, is an attempt to understand the ways that the 'meanings' attached to femininity are rooted in a specific context. I may imply and depend upon an underlying acceptance of the relationship *between* femininity and masculinity, but

will not focus on this. Rather my concern is with how categories of femininity and womanliness were constructed at this time and can cast light on the ways that knowledge about gender identities was (and is) produced. There are always choices to be made and these are always political; in this context my choice was to attend to femininity.

In addition, there is a personal dimension to this investigation, and another way of writing about it; I refer to a strategy that has been foregrounded by feminist writers on research and methodology in terms of the notion of 'situated knowledge': a self-referentiality that recognises and includes the positionality of the self in relation to the 'research object' and thereby refuses the notion of an absolute 'objectivity' in research (see Donna Haraway, 1991: 183-201). In this sense, my interest in femininity in this period is also an attempt to 'make sense of' myself. As a product of what was, as I shall demonstrate, an aspirant, working-class femininity premised upon notions of 'properness' and expressed through sanctioned patterns of consumption and display, this inquiry is also an exploration of origins and foundations; an attempt to understand the past in order to understand more fully the contours of the present. As Donna Haraway puts it:

"We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meaning and bodies but in order to live in meanings and bodies that have a chance for the future." (Haraway, 1991: 187)

The issues raised in this thesis were initiated by my interest in a single film: *Yield to the Night* (1956), starring Diana Dors and recounting the story of a woman

condemned to death for the murder of the woman who, she believes, was responsible for her lover's suicide. However, the following is not an analysis of a single film, isolated from context and replete with meaning. What made me curious about *Yield to the Night* started off as a simple 'question': how could the film be made sense of - in what contexts and with what consequences was *Yield to the Night* exhibited and received? With its insistent examination and subsequent 'punishment' of a glamorous female figure, *Yield to the Night* seemed to represent a point at which certain debates and anxieties about femininity in Britain between 1945 and 1958 were closed off. Another way of putting this would be to say that *Yield to the Night* struck me as resonant in respect of its treatment of its female star and I was interested to find out how I could account for what started out as a 'feeling' that here, in this particular film and in this particular representation of a female character (Diana Dors as Mary Hilton), was some sort of answer to the 'problem' of femininity in Britain throughout the mid-1940s to the late-1950s; how it came to be characterised, represented and constructed in the ways that it was. Of course, the discussion of the circulation of meanings 'about' femininity is not focused solely on my analysis of *Yield to the Night* and is approached through looking at other selected British films from the period, but it began with this film and the questions it raised

My desire to understand more clearly the problematics of *Yield to the Night* was the starting point for the following analysis of femininity and womanliness in this period, but is not its sole focus. In Chapter 4 selected British films from the period

are considered with respect to the identification of a consistency in the 'treatment' of female characters, and a coherence in relation to the ways that femininity was constructed and represented in accordance with 'dominant' ideas about women, their roles and positions in Britain at this time. The films discussed in Chapter 4 suggest that not only were possible choices for 'womanliness' circumscribed and limited, but that the primary axis along which femininity was constructed and represented was that of class with particular attention to the 'problem' of working-class femininity.

Quite definite ideas about femininity - emanating from both critical writing about the cinema and from wider cultural discourses - were replicated and foregrounded in British Cinema of the period. Moreover, this had particular consequences for the ways in which notions about appropriate forms of feminine behaviour and display (appearance, dress, habits, presentation) circulated in the culture at this time. For instance, I will show that the conflation of femininity with particular class positions produced representations of femininity which accorded with identifiable class positions such that femininity and class become almost interdependent - the ascription of gender identities relies upon notions of class structures for its meaning and, as I shall discuss in Chapter 2, elements of class formations in Britain at this time gained meaning from an association with definite notions of femininity.

The selection of films for analysis was made according to two main concerns: first

that the films discussed should be those from the period that focused on the lives and experiences of female characters; second, that they fall within a general category of films that were identifiable for their presentation of women within what might be called a 'realistic frame'. This is not to claim an easy equivalence between British Cinema and 'realism' - although the notion of 'realism' was important to the presentation of a specific type of British film as I shall discuss in Chapter 5 in relation to the discourse of the 'Quality Film' and notions of the female cinema audience - nor is it possible to enter into a detailed discussion about the problems with 'realism'<sup>5</sup> as a mode of representation. However it was important to me that I look at films that presented women within easily identifiable, contemporaneous settings and situations rather than focus on presentations of femininity within the boundaries of what might be called 'fantasy' or 'escapist' films.<sup>6</sup>

This is a different approach from that taken by other feminist analyses of British Cinema which have tended to concentrate on certain types of British Cinema

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<sup>5</sup>The alliance of British film with realism and the valorisation of British Cinema as 'realistic' is well documented. For a discussion of British Cinema which attends to its peculiarly 'schizophrenic' nature - oscillating between 'realism' and 'fantasy' - see Charles Barr's "Introduction: Amnesia and Schizophrenia" in Barr (ed.), 1986: 1-30. Also relevant in the same volume are Andrew Higson's "Britain's Outstanding Contribution to the Film: The documentary-realist tradition" (72-97), and Julian Petley's "The Lost Continent" (98-119).

<sup>6</sup>This is not to make the assumption that 'fantasy' or 'escapist' films are 'less valid' than other, 'realistic', ones, nor to imply that such films offer 'easy' palliatives to the 'bored and shallow' female viewer. Rather it is to choose to consider a particular type of film for definite reasons, as are explained below.

production to argue for a subversive or alternative space within representations of femininity that offer the possibility for 'oppositional' readings of films. Work such as Sue Harper's analysis of Gainsborough Melodramas<sup>7</sup> for instance, is productive for its focus on the ways in which certain films provide a space for the portrayal of a "female sexuality denied expression through conventional signifying systems" (1987: 188). However, where certain narrative structures and historical settings may offer alternative reading positions from which women cinemagoers could "manoeuvre [their] own way through narrative codes" (ibid.: 191), it was never my intention to re-visit these discussions or follow such lines of investigation or argument.<sup>8</sup> Rather, the problematics of 'British Realist Cinema' notwithstanding, my concern has been with 'realistic' representations or, perhaps more accurately, with what might be called 'dominant representations' - those films in which femininity is constrained and presented according to cultural or social 'norms'.

The reason for this choice was a desire to try to understand the ways that dominant British culture prescribed femininity in particular ways at a particular historical moment and then re-produced these in dominant representational structures.

Moreover, as I outline below, I also wanted to try to identify where these emanated from and how women audience members of the time incorporated them into their

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<sup>7</sup>See Harper's "Historical Pleasures. Gainsborough Costume Melodrama" in Christine Gledhill (ed.), 1987: 167-96. See also Sue Aspinall and Robert Murphy (eds.), 1983.

<sup>8</sup>As I have noted above, if there was a 'paradigmatic text' for this thesis, it is represented by Hill and not by what might be characterised as 'cultural populist' approaches: see Jim McGuigan, 1992.

lives or, alternatively, rejected them. As I shall discuss below, the *ways* that films were remembered - the preciseness of certain remembrances - suggests that it is not necessarily a film's narrative structure that connects with viewers but single images or scenes that somehow resonate in ways that indicate particular viewing practices. These may problematise notions of viewer- text relationships built around the idea that narrative structures and codes are either determinant, or the means whereby alternative or subversive readings are made possible. In subsequent chapters, I shall argue against those readings of British Cinema which propose a 'liberatory' space for women audience members in historical or 'escapist' films characterised by Gainsborough Melodramas, or films such as *Black Narcissus* (1947) which represent what Petley has called 'the lost continent' of British Cinema (1986: 98-119). Finally, I would argue that such films were watched *as* fantasy or 'escapist' films; they may provide us with vital insights into a 'hidden' or (critically) de-valued British Cinema and thus present another, alternative, reading of British culture's construction of femininity (Harper, op. cit.: 168), but this is precisely a construction that is hidden or alternative. What I am interested in is the overt, the dominant construction and this thesis is an examination of the ways in which dominant forms of knowledge about femininity were produced (and re-produced) within historically and culturally specific conditions and the consequences of this for women in the period.

It should be evident that what is being proposed here is not simply an engagement with the predominant strand of British Cinema (the 'Realist tradition'), but an



examination of a range of sites in which post-war British femininity was also open to 'reconstruction'. This argues for an approach to research that is carried out on a number of fronts, providing a kind of understanding that is qualitatively different from that made possible by analyses of films in isolation, as cinematic 'texts'.

The search for answers to my questions about the nature and 'meaning' of femininity as it was represented in *Yield to the Night*, initiated a consideration of the film *qua* film - narrative, mise en scène, framing devices and so on (see Chapter 6) - but also, more strikingly, the way in which it was written about at the time by critics. Looking at the reviews of *Yield to the Night*, it was apparent that the film presented real difficulties for critics and that these difficulties were not to be understood through an examination of the film itself but were located in the relationship between the film and its star - between Diana Dors as Mary Hilton and Diana Dors as 'British film star' - as well as in the relationship between the film and its audience. Dors' appearance for most of the film without make-up, without the conventional trappings of 'glamour', confounded and confused reviewers and critics who simply did not know how to write about it.

It was here, in the critical disarray that surrounded the film, that a different set of questions began to present themselves; questions that were concerned to investigate the spaces between the film and its critical response and that were revealed not in explicit utterances, but in that which was absent or obscure in critical discourse. This is apparent in the language and tone of the reviews and two

examples will suffice here to illustrate the point (others are discussed in Chapter 6):

“The film’s purpose is in part frustrated by the failure of Miss Diana Dors to touch the more subtle of the emotions...so far as unselfish effort and physical appearance go, there is no fault to find with her. Gone is the bright, platinum smartness and in its place there appear the face and figure of a square, stoutish woman, ravaged of feature, drab and unprepossessing...” (*The Times*, June 18, 1956)

“The film career of Miss Diana Dors has, ironically enough, been handicapped by her possession of a torso like a figure of eight cut out of eiderdown...Miss Dors has always had the face of an actress and not a film star. It is not beautiful, hardly even pretty. But *Yield to the Night* allows us to get the lowdown on the pin-up...Diana Dors peels off her uniform of warpaint and reveals the insecure human conscript underneath.” (*Evening Standard*, June 14, 1956)

Why did reviewers find it so difficult to write about the film other than in relation to Dors’ appearance? What was it about this actress in this film that seems to have been so unmanageable? The reviews of *Yield to the Night* are peppered with excessive language which suggests that they are somehow *about* the derision of the figure of Dors. There is such a sense of unease and discomfort here that it seemed more and more apparent that something about *Yield to the Night* could not be understood simply from *looking at* it.

There seemed to be two possible avenues through which some sort of answers might be found to the peculiar status of *Yield to the Night*: first, an examination of the ways that critical discourse conceptualised ‘the female cinema audience’ (the discursive audience of the film and the readership of critical reviews and commentary); and second, an attempt to reach the social audience - viewers of the film in 1956 - to gauge their response and its place in their memories. I shall deal

with the issue of critical discourse on the female cinema audience first and then discuss the 'audience survey' carried out in an attempt to access a different set of views.

The analysis of how the female cinema audience was produced in writing about British Cinema throughout the period revealed important insights into the ways that femininity was constructed according to particular assumptions, both about who women were and about the nature of their relationship to culture in general and cinema in particular. T.J. Clark's analysis of Gustave Courbet in his book *Image of the People* (1973) pays attention to the ways that responses to Courbet's paintings varied across 'critical' and 'public' arenas. The distinction he provides between notions of 'the audience' - a social body that can be quantified - and 'the public' - a representation, even a fantasy, that is produced in critical writing - has been influential in my understanding of how the female audience was constructed in critical writings from the period.

"...the public is different from the audience: the latter can be examined empirically, and should be...As for the public, we could make an analogy with Freudian theory. The unconscious is nothing but its conscious representations, its closure in the faults, silences and caesuras of normal discourse. In the same way, the public is nothing but the *private* representations that are made of it, in this case the discourse of the critic...What interests us....are the points at which the rational monotone of the critic breaks, fails, falters...the points where the criticism is incomprehensible are the keys to its comprehension. The public, like the unconscious, is present only where it ceases; yet it determines the structure of private discourse; it is the key to what cannot be said, and no subject is more important." (Clark, 1973: 12, emphasis in the original.)

Chapter 5 concentrates on two paradigmatic film texts from the 1940s and 1950s -

*Penguin Film Review* (1946-9) and *The Picturegoer* (1931-60) - and, using Clark's 'audience'/'public' distinction, shows how the presentation of a gendered cinema audience ('the public') reinforces established notions of the masculine nature of modernity. It will become evident that typically, and in these two publications, the female cinema audience is identified with (even conflated with) popular cinema and its products. This popular cinema was in turn identified with, or held to derive from, the products of Hollywood and American culture. In Britain at this time, 'Americanisation' was a source of envy, fear and loathing for its supposed corruption of 'traditional' and 'authentic' British culture and values (see Chapter 2).

Here in these two film publications it is possible to identify 'the public' when writing about the cinema audience falters or becomes incomprehensible. This is nowhere more apparent than in the silences and breaks in the critics' discourse, in the places where 'the audience' *becomes* 'the public' and is articulated only through eruptions in that discourse. This is a discursively constructed audience; it may be contradictory and elusive but it is identifiable in these texts both through its presence and in its absence. Clearly indebted to Foucauldian theory, such an analysis provides access to, and an understanding of, the ways that an 'enigmatic mass'<sup>9</sup> (the feminine audience) was produced.

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, 1984 (1974): 31. The entire sentence reads: "What sort of links can validly be recognised between all these statements that form, in such a familiar and insistent way, such an enigmatic mass?"

Such an analysis of British Cinema is productive so far as it goes, but critical examination can become so abstract as to lose its anchorage in 'the real world'. To present a fuller picture, critical textual analysis needs a counterpoint and another level of input that can challenge the validity of the projected audience of critical discourse and test it against the experiences of social subjects, by gauging the pleasures, identifications and social functions films offered women - by asking members of the 'real' audience of these films what they thought about them.

Research that focuses on the text as the site of the production of meaning presents problems for the understanding of where those meanings emanate from: to concentrate on individual texts or a selection of texts, and to locate meaning solely in them is to overlook the subtle, complex and often contradictory ways in which texts gain their meanings from both the cultures within which they are produced and the ways in which they are negotiated by those individuals to whom they are addressed. If the discursively constructed audience could be read through the writings of 'real women' it seemed that it may be possible to clarify the extent to which categorisations of 'the audience' effect women's conceptions of themselves, and to reveal something of the nature of masculine notions of femininity

The turn to the female audience, however, introduced new methodological problems that were both pragmatic (the impossibility of establishing a retrospective, 'representative' sample) and theoretical (the controversial status of certain social science methods within feminism). Debates between 'feminist' and

‘traditional’ researchers in the social sciences have placed the politics of research on the disciplinary agenda and raised important questions about the nature of the production of knowledge. These issues are relevant here since the status of ‘empirical research’ (in this case questionnaires), has been made problematic by feminist critiques which have favoured ‘qualitative research’ (such as un-structured or in-depth interviewing) over the ‘masculinist orthodoxy’ of quantitative, statistical research.<sup>10</sup> Put briefly, such arguments contend that certain research methods (techniques for gathering evidence) are male-centred and antithetical to feminist values not simply in terms of method (statistics, surveys, questionnaires) but also in terms of methodology. In her Introduction to *Feminism & Methodology* (1987: 1-14), Sandra Harding discusses the issue of ‘feminist method’ in social science research. She argues against the idea of a distinctive feminist method and identifies the limitations of certain feminist strategies such as ‘adding women’ to traditional analytic frameworks. For Harding, problems with research methods are related to both methodology (“a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed”, Harding: 3), and epistemology (a theory of knowledge). Thus, feminist epistemological questions have impacted on research methodologies in so far as such questions are also “challenges to the grand theories and the background assumptions of traditional social inquiry” (ibid.: 10) Her discussion of the

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<sup>10</sup>See for instance: Helen Roberts (ed.), 1992; Sandra Harding (ed.), 1987; Liz Stanley (ed.), 1990; Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (eds.), 1993; Mary Maynard and June Purvis (eds.), 1994. For details of an ongoing debate within sociology on the issue of feminist versus ‘masculinist’ methodology see Hammersley (1992 & 1994), Gelsthorpe (1992), Ramazanoglu (1992) and Williams (1993).

connections between method, methodology and epistemology highlights the ways that the process of research, and the assumptions behind the questions it asks of its research object, effects the production of knowledge. As far as this project is concerned, these issues were prompted by the idea of carrying out some sort of empirical research - how could I gain information from women cinemagoers that would be considered a valid method for providing valid resource material and how could this be done in such a way as to cut across ideas that information gained using a 'traditional' technique would undermine a feminist research project? Moreover, would it be possible to formulate a questionnaire that would provide both quantitative and qualitative material, and how might information gained in this way be utilised to yield relevant insights about films, film stars or women's lives throughout the 1940s and 1950s? With respect to the status of certain methods in feminist research, Maynard and Purvis (1994) have identified a move away from the 'feminist orthodoxy' of 'qualitative research' towards a more flexible approach in which the value of a range of different methods is recognised (see Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 1-8 & 10-26). It is in this spirit that the questionnaire information is offered here; where it is recognised that there are difficulties with a number of aspects of information that is gained in this way, it is also true that there is illumination to be gained here that could not be obtained from other sources.

The impetus for initiating a questionnaire arose from a conviction that it would be possible to use responses as a yardstick against which to measure both contemporary critical accounts of films and subsequent writing about British films

that was based largely or solely on textual analysis. For example, in her book *Celluloid Sisters* (1992), Janet Thumim carries out a highly detailed analysis of the structural aspects of representations of women in 'popular films' from the 1940s, 50s and 60s, and to this end her study is focused on the "introduction, definition and resolution of the female characters" (1992: 10). Whilst the selection of films for analysis in Thumim's study was one that adhered rigidly to a notion of the 'popularity' of certain films and thus was in some ways exemplary in its approach (i.e., those films analysed were selected because they were 'popular' - watched by the largest audiences - at the time of their first release, see pp.11-9 on this; pp. 28-35 on Thumim's audience), her study nevertheless concentrates on a structural textual analysis of the films. Where this can provide relevant insights into the mechanisms whereby certain representational structures dominate others (i.e., how women tended to be introduced in films in particular ways, what narrative themes recur throughout the period and how these can be seen to present particular roles for female characters) such an approach does not adequately account for *how* certain films or narrative structures come to dominate and are 'naturalised', nor does such an approach allow for a full consideration of the ways in which the ideological work of films is rooted in and dependent upon other, extra-cinematic, elements for its meaning. This is not, of course, to argue that Thumim's approach to the question of representation of women in films between 1945-65 is not a valid or productive one, simply that this was not the route I wished to follow.

I am interested to see how certain films contributed to the possible production,



replication and reproduction of particular, dominant *ideas* about the nature, constituents and texture of femininity in Britain throughout a period of transition and upheaval. This is to pose quite different questions and to look for different answers in the texts themselves. Therefore, the initiation of an aspect of research that was on the surface empirical and statistical was not begun as an end in itself but as a beginning: to try to uncover the riddles and enigmas of *Yield to the Night*.

The 'audience survey' represented by the questionnaires was begun in May 1989 with a letter sent to a range of local newspapers throughout the British Isles (see appendix for a copy of the questionnaire and a list of newspapers contacted). From this initial foray I received a small number of letters from interested women from as far afield as Aberdeen and Bournemouth, where my letter had been printed. Subsequently, the same letter was published in the TV Times of June 3-9, 1989. Within weeks the sample for the questionnaire had expanded from an initial group of 20 or so, to over 400 (350 of which were returned completed); whether by luck or misfortune, the questionnaire had changed from a small but interesting aspect of a research project that wanted to be able to say something about how a few women reacted to the films I was interested in, to an aspect of the project that retained its small ambitions but had outgrown them.

The questionnaire was formulated in response to my own questions about the period and about the films from the period, such as: How, for instance, might the representation of women in films from this period be related to a historically

specific construction of Britishness? What types of enjoyments or pleasures did women take from cinemagoing? How did women make sense of the representations of women (of themselves) that were offered to them? I include these, not because they were the only questions I was interested in initially, nor because the following arguments provide 'answers' to them but because it is important to establish the reasons for utilising particular types of research method.

The questionnaire itself consisted of four parts covering the following areas:<sup>11</sup> social background and personal details (education, marital status, patterns of employment for respondents and for respondents' parents and/or spouse, and so on). The second section concentrated on cinema going habits and film preferences (patterns of attendance - how many times per week, alone or with other women, or with a 'boyfriend' - preferences in terms of genre, and in terms of British or American films); the third section asked for respondents' comments on a number of British films ranging from 'melodramas' such as *The Wicked Lady* (1945), to 'quality films' such as *Brief Encounter* (1945) or *The Seventh Veil* (1945), to films which may be characterised as proto- 'social realism' such as *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957). Most of the films selected were popular films from the period, and were chosen because they focused on women or had women as main characters, but many of them had not been re-evaluated through either mainstream or

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<sup>11</sup>I am indebted to Andy Medhurst for his advice on the structure and circulation of the questionnaires. The questionnaire used in this project was closely based on one he had previously devised and circulated with interesting results.

revisionist film histories. From this section, and after re-viewing the films, I chose for discussion those films which provided the clearest examples of the aspects of the presentation of femininity I was interested in: class and consumption. This has meant that many films originally included on the questionnaire are not discussed, however those that do feature below are most pertinent to the concerns of this project and were selected in the light of my research into the period and the themes that emerged from this. The final section of the questionnaire requested comments on a number of women 'stars' of the period - for example, Margaret Lockwood, Ann Todd, Jean Kent and Diana Dors - comments from this section have been influential in my reading of *Yield to the Night*.

In addition to this initial information, a number of women (40 or so) were contacted a second time and asked to respond to a set of more specific questions around my main areas of interest: notions of glamour, consumerism and consumption and the ways that *ideas* about women, as presented to them in the films, did or did not impact upon their own thinking about themselves and their lives. These women were encouraged to supply their own comments, memories and thoughts about particular aspects of the period.

The questionnaire was targeted solely at women who were regular film-goers throughout the 40s and 50s - since my interest was representations of women and women's responses to them, I chose not to include men in the sample; I make no apology for this focus on women and have mentioned previously the implications

in and for research that focuses on one sex to the exclusion of the other (see also Chapter 2). Of course, it is also true that respondents were entirely self-selecting and whilst this may mean enthusiastic and interested responses it also means that any notion of 'representationality' is diluted if not altogether lost. Once again, I make no apology for the fact that the 'survey' carried out as part of this research could not 'qualify' as 'straight' empirical work; the questionnaires were never intended to be either representative or comprehensive, rather they were prompted by a belief that a few judiciously placed comments from 'real women' could go some way to de-naturalise and differentiate the ways in which women were represented in films and written about as an audience. Their ambition outstripped mine and whilst the comments and letters I received cannot be fully explicated in this thesis, the sense they provided of the period is present throughout.

The problem of how to situate the questionnaire comments and responses in relation to textual analyses of the films and writing about the female audience has been difficult to resolve entirely. Nevertheless, the questionnaire yielded invaluable and productive information covering aspects of cinema going and women's lives that would not have been forthcoming from other sources. Furthermore, it was quite apparent from the comments and observations supplied by some respondents that not least of the factors that prompted their interest was that here was someone who was interested in what they had to say, in memories and recollections of their lives of over forty-five years ago. I do not mean to treat this in an offhand way, but it is difficult to articulate how much the women who wrote to me revealed about

themselves in their comments and letters - their dreams, hopes, anxieties, disappointments - and thus how much they gave me a flavour of the period. For the women themselves, their engagement with the questionnaire was not uncomplicated; for some the very act of writing about their lives evoked powerful and sometimes difficult memories; several women wrote of their surprise and pleasure in being asked to remember; whilst others wrote of the feelings of frustration and anger that were provoked by the act of remembering. This bears testimony to the importance of the immediate post-war years in these women's lives and in those of their mothers, as well as providing a salutary reminder of the omission of women's voices from history, as well as from more text-based analyses of film and other forms of representation.

However, there is another aspect to this material that must be addressed. Some women who wrote to me stated clearly that 'being asked to think back' made them newly remember how different, difficult and circumscribed their lives had been. The act of remembering, of being asked to remember in order to reconstruct one's past, is also and perhaps primarily a process of re-remembering the self and many respondents felt the exercise had been helpful to them. Yet where the inclusion of previously marginalised or ignored voices was part of my reason for wanting to use an oral history approach, this also necessitates a consideration of how to deal with information that is both 're-constructed' and personal. It is important to recognise the limitations of accounts offered some forty years after the event, but the veracity of these women's recollections cannot be challenged since they were re-telling

their 'truths'. At the same time, some of the information I received was deeply person and often poignant, given in a relation of trust and therefore deserving of respect and care in its treatment. I have tried to be sensitive to this in my use of the questionnaire material. The questionnaire comments are used throughout this thesis in a range of contexts and are thus asked to perform more than one task, but I do not claim that they provide an unmediated access to women's experience of the period, the cinema or of 'audiencehood'. Nevertheless, as a source of hitherto untapped and unrecorded memories and recollections, the questionnaire comments and the follow-up letters have informed my arguments in diverse ways.

If feminist theories about research and the production of feminist knowledge have made uncomfortable the assumptions and presuppositions that surround certain approaches to research, it is also true that they have made research a political arena in which it is vital to attend to questions of approaches to research and this means being both sensitive to resource materials and explicit about the process of research. This is not simply an attempt to legitimise work that sits uncomfortably in relation to a more pure sense of what might constitute 'valid' research in film studies, cultural studies or women's studies, but it is to express and recognise the importance of research practices - methodologies - that are aware of what is at stake in the process of producing knowledge about a given subject. Thus, I do not claim that the questionnaire material is inviolate, pure and 'truthful' but that it is valuable; valuable in that it gives a space in which women who had not previously been given a voice can speak, provides information that would not be available

elsewhere, and is grounded in the lives, experiences and recollections of 'real women' who were subject to a range of social, economic and ideological pressures to be and to represent very particular forms of womanliness. It is here, in its variety, in its complexity and in its resonances with wider social structures that the questionnaire material gains its strength.

Simultaneously, there is an elusive quality to the questionnaire responses; the comments and remembrances contained in the questionnaires are both 'real' in that they reflect the 'true' experiences of the lives of the women who wrote to me, but they are also 'unreal' in so far as they attest to re-remembered elements of women's lives from a 'future' position from which they were being asked to 'look back'. In this context, Walter Benjamin's discussion of memory and consciousness provides a useful way of talking about the elusiveness of memory and remembrance. Citing the psychologist Theodore Reik, Benjamin begins his discussion of memory thus:

"The function of remembrance...is the protection of impressions; memory...aims at their disintegration. Remembrance is essentially conservative, memory is destructive." (1982 (1955): 162)

In this schema, remembrances can be thought of as productive, a process that functions in some way to produce as well as conserve what might be called a sense of the past, a narrativising of 'history' and of one's place within 'history'. Memory on the other hand, is a process of 'coming to consciousness' and the 'making conscious' of memory destroys the memory itself since the act of memorialising makes conscious a 'thing' that previously existed unconsciously. In the same way

that an unconscious wish or desire remains unconscious only until it becomes conscious, memory remains memory only until it becomes conscious, until it is re-membered:

‘Therefore, “it would be the special characteristic of consciousness that, unlike what happens in all other psychical systems, the excitatory process does not leave behind a permanent change in its elements, but expires, as it were, in the phenomenon of becoming conscious...becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory trace are processes incompatible with each other”. Rather, memory fragments are “often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness”. ’ (ibid.: 162)<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps, therefore, it is not necessarily appropriate to characterise the majority of the questionnaire responses as ‘memories’ in this sense, but as ‘remembrances’ since they are in many ways part of a process of active reconstruction, a response to being asked to remember. An extract from two of the questionnaire follow-up letters exemplifies precisely this activity of reconstruction, of the productive aspect of remembrance:

‘...Although not affected personally by what I believe to be a “con trick” on my Mother’s generation...in writing what I have written this evening I have felt anger welling up in me, on behalf of her generation of women, who “went to the ball” during 1939 to 1945 and were expected to turn back into pumpkins on the stroke of V.J. Night. I did not know I felt this way...but it’s just naturally led on, from thinking about [the films] in the sort of detail your questions have prompted.’ (Pat Brandreth)

“I’m glad you made me look back because I find that although I was young, I was part of the probings of female identity, finding that surviving was not dependent upon latching on to a male...” (Joyce Cadogan)

At the same time, there is still something striking about the questionnaire responses

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<sup>12</sup>The citations in this extract are from Freud’s essay ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’ and can be found (though not in precisely the same sequence) in Freud, 1991 (1984): 296-7.



in terms of the ways in which certain films and/or images from the time provoked quite specific and powerful remembrances. These concerned the evocation of individual scenes or 'frozen moments' from individual films, especially in relation to *Yield to the Night* (1956) and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957), which were recalled in vivid detail and which were remembered outside of the context of their place in the narrative of the films. In her book *Star Gazing* (1994), Jackie Stacey writes in similar terms of the ways in which respondents to her questionnaire on Hollywood cinema and stars often wrote of their recollections as 'a particular "frozen moment", taken out of its temporal context and captured as "pure image"...This is not only true of memories of the stars, but also of the spectators' memories of themselves' (1994: 67). In the 'audience survey' carried out for this project, I also received responses which articulated particular instances or scenes from films, remembered experiences from the period which are imbued with a sense of meaning that exists above and beyond the place such an image or experience would have within the context of a film. For instance, one woman wrote of two incidents she remembered of 'transforming herself' into a version of the main female character in the film she had last seen: of returning home after seeing *The Wicked Lady* and painting a beauty spot on her cheek; and, secondly, "I saw one of the leading ladies close her eyes, no doubt in a kiss, and tried to copy her eyelids, so that night I painted mum's clear nail varnish on to my eyelids" (M. Milne). Another woman recalled how she and her friend would, on their return home after a visit to the cinema, try to reproduce the look of the female star in the

film they had just watched:

“My friend and I would float out of the cinema totally convinced that we ourselves actually looked like the female star we had just seen! This wonderful feeling would last even through the bus ride home. We would try to dress like the stars did...We would have great flowing skirts with layers and layers of petticoats, we would have crippling tight waist bands and wear little white wrist gloves and flat shoes...The films also influenced us (me anyway) as to what and how we ate. You would never see a pretty girl actually eating on the screen...You would never hear her gulp when she drank...therefore I would never eat in the company of the opposite sex, neither would I drink...Everything had to be just right - we were pristine clean with not a hair out of place - just like our idols on the screen - every penny we earned went on new clothes which resembled as much as possible those worn by filmstars.” (P Hawkins)

It is apparent from just these examples that part of the pleasure gained by the women who wrote to me lay in the ways that they ‘used’ cinemagoing and films to provide them with certain ideas about, or attitudes towards, the messages they were given. They neither simply rejected these, nor were they wholly seduced by them, but they made meanings from the films of a dominant, realist British Cinema in ways that were connected to their life experiences - physically (as in the extract from P. Hawkins) or imaginatively (as with M. Milne); but these were always related to the material conditions of women in the period.<sup>13</sup>

For Stacey this type of remembrance is characterised as ‘iconic’ as it focuses on an

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<sup>13</sup>I do not subscribe to a view that valorises ‘subversive readings’ and argues that readings and negotiations are ‘progressive’ if they are carried out by ‘oppressed groups’ (see McGuigan, 1992 for a good critique of cultural populist approaches), and in any case, both the reductive and restrictive nature of representations in these films and the comments of the questionnaire respondents would make it difficult to sustain such a position. However, it is at the same time important to recognise the validity and effectivity of these experiences for the women who wrote of them.

image or a group of images, and she provides a useful summary of how this notion of iconic remembrance functions to illustrate

“the extent to which femininity is defined in patriarchal culture as an unattainable visual image of desirability...To present oneself to the world for approval in terms of physical attractiveness is the ultimate demand made of femininity...the centrality of the visual image to feminine ideals produces lasting and powerful memories of such ideals which endure the passing of time. The feelings of loss, often experienced in the gap between the self and the ideal at the time, is deepened and extended as feminine ideals become ever-increasingly a lost possibility.” (1994: 66-7)

Questionnaires, follow-up letters and so on can yield a mass of empirical material and in doing so can provide insights into a range of ‘easy’ questions about cinema attendance, opinions about and recollections of films, stars or, as was the case with this questionnaire, remembrances of poignant or resonant scenes in films.

However, this gives only one side of a story that is complex and contradictory.

Where we can see that a critical reading of film magazines and journals provides a way of accessing discursive constructions of ‘the feminine,’ and empirical material can give the female audience a voice, it is nevertheless necessary to find some way in which a range of statements, beliefs, memories and perceptions can be understood in relation to the specific context in which they circulated.

To approach these issues requires a further layer of investigation; one that can begin to address them in relation to the specific social, political, economic and cultural structures of the period, that considers questions about new class formations, about changed relations of production, about embourgeoisement and social mobility. In addition, historicisation needs to attend to questions about, for

instance, the re-negotiation of Britain's place in the world, particularly vis-à-vis what were new forms of American power and influence, both economic and cultural; and Britain's changed status and sense of itself in the immediate post-war years. But these questions in turn must be read against the changed expectations and real conditions of women's lives in relation to the private and public spheres and the tensions this created between wartime 'freedoms' and post-war 'containment', between new forms of consumption and notions of femininity which emanated from these - as seen in the presentation of women as objects of glamour, for instance, and their entry into new patterns of consumption.

It is how they are read in relation to the specificities of context that the other Chapters in this thesis gain and offer insights that may not otherwise be apparent. In relation to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s, 'social history' must also account for the ways that this period is both contained within and conceptualised in relation to the formations of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation, as both material conditions and as ideological constructions, and here I would like to clarify my usage of these terms, as well as their development in this thesis.

My investigation into *Yield to the Night* - its critical reception, its reception by female audience members, as well as my reading of it as a film - made it clear that here was a problematic text with certain easily identifiable, cultural, socio-economic and sexual themes. What I have tried to do is disentangle the relations between these themes and the problematic nature of *Yield to the Night*. My

questions then become more specific: what is the relationship between the ideological work of the film (itself related to, but not wholly determined by, the socio-economic conditions of its production and reception); its deployment of the star persona of its chief protagonist; its troubled status within British Cinematic realism; and the difficulties with critical discourse about the film for which we need recourse to some concept of the unconscious?

The precise nature of the primary terms Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation in the social context of the period and for *Yield to the Night* has proved harder to define. I have resisted pinning them down within any of the easily available conceptual categories because they have different registers - that is, they are not monolithic or univocal but diverse: at once social and economic, ideological and discursive. Perhaps Foucault offers the most useful framework within which to characterise them:

‘Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation* - thus avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences, and, in any case inadequate to the task of designating such a dispersion, such as “science”, “ideology”, or “domain of objectivity”. The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concept, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the *rules of formation*. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification and disappearance) in a given discursive division.’ (Foucault, 1985 (1974): 38, emphasis in the original.)

Themes that connect with, or articulate aspects of, Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation are all present (though not equally weighted) in *Yield to the Night*.

These required further analysis if the connections between text, context, reception and femininity were to be uncovered, and it became clear early on that Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation were gendered.

Each of these terms is rooted in an economic reality - limited means and near national bankruptcy in Austerity; relative wealth, higher personal disposable income and high levels of employment in Affluence; economic dependence on the U.S.A., in respect of both loans and exports, through Americanisation. Each of these terms evokes a certain sense of the lived conditions of the period, and each occupies a different place in the (shifting) cultural formation throughout the period. At the same time, Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation are articulated in the culture through recourse to certain terms which have a variable relationship to the dominant ideology of the period, particularly in relation to issues of gender. Accordingly, Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation reveal their nature, function and identity in the ways that they speak their relationship to the socio-economic and to women.

The pertinence of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation in the period 1945-58 has been gained from the questionnaire material as well as from other, contemporaneous and later sources, including the film publications discussed and extensive viewing of films from the time. Thus, Austerity emerges in the mixed feelings of optimism and despondency that mark the immediate post-war years, as well as in the attempts of the post-war Government to evoke ideas of nationhood and the urgency of reconstruction as mobilising principles around which to

galvanise a tired and over-burdened populace. In turn, Austerity addressed women in such a way that notions of proper womanliness were held in tension with the contradictory identities of citizen/worker and wife/mother.

Affluence, which was accompanied by a range of significant cultural changes, can be evoked in terms of relative wealth, economic stability and, importantly, the allure of new lifestyles as glimpsed through an expanding television network and the cinema. It is, again, the contradictory place of women in relation to Affluence that is apposite here. Where, in one sense, it would be legitimate to argue that Affluence is more easily characterised in terms of its ideological work (see Chapter 2), and thus attend to the place of women in Affluence in terms of the development of post-war consumer capitalism, it is not strictly this that I am concerned to invoke here, although women's place as consumers in the 1950s is important.

Undoubtedly, Affluence was part of an ideological force that helped to bolster the economic and cultural transformations and consensus politics of the period, but women had a 'function' within Affluence, and were addressed by it in ways that problematise it. Women were central to Affluence as consumers, and as mothers and housewives, yet this created certain tensions due to the nature of women's lived experience: their material conditions were quite different from their symbolic relation to reality.<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 3, this notion of contradiction is expanded through a

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<sup>14</sup>This is to invoke an Althusserian notion of ideology as follows:  
 "...all ideology represents in its necessarily imaginary distortion not the existing relations of production (and the other relations that derive from

social historical account that attends to women's relationship to work and the home. This Chapter refers to both questionnaire material and secondary sources to support the more discursive accounts presented in Chapter 2, and to provide further evidence of the range of pressures (socio-economic and ideological) that women were subject to throughout the latter years of the period.

Significantly, women's place as consumers in Affluence relied upon notions of 'proper' patterns of consumption that were tied to dominant ideas about class and sexuality, but also to notions of 'taste' and 'value'. It is in relation to this that Americanisation achieves a particular expression - that of the evocation of a glamorous, seductive and precocious femininity which was seen to represent a threat both to notions of 'proper' or 'appropriate' feminine behaviour, and to the preservation of the national culture. Americanisation is rooted in a particular class faction, and represents the fears and anxieties of the dominant culture; these may reflect a certain 'unease' about the economic relationship between Britain and the

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them), but above all the (imaginary) relationship of individuals to the relations of production and the relations that derive from them. What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live." (1971: 155.)

Therefore, it is my argument that the differences between women's lived experiences and their 'ideological function' at a certain time in the 1950s, are such that it is possible to identify contradictions. This is, I believe, because Affluence in particular is both ideological and discursive in nature, and this makes it especially problematic. The position of women in Affluence and the construction of femininity that it foregrounded were held in such tension that it is possible to see both the 'cracks and fissures' in Affluence, and the fragility of the nature of 'proper womanliness' that it constructs.



U.S.A., and about Britain's weakening international position, but they are articulated in relation to issues of gender and class. The discourse of Americanisation calls upon a set of moral and value judgements that reveal an uneasiness with respect to changes in the national culture (particularly with respect to the development of consumer capitalism, and especially a consumerism associated with an 'Americanised', spectacular consumption), and a fear of the working-classes and female sexuality. There are closely related to, but not always explicitly linked with, the dominant ideology of the period - most particularly with Affluence. However, it is also the case that the particular terms Americanisation works with are rooted in Austerity; that is to say that the particular 'values' that characterise Americanisation gain their meanings from the 'moral climate' of Austerity. Thus, Americanisation is less historically fixed than are the other two terms.

Although these Chapters do not consider the specific texts under investigation (critical discourse, film reviews, the films themselves), it is my belief that an understanding of the context for cultural production is almost more critical than an analysis of the films themselves. It is only in relation to the specificities of a particular context that it is possible to evaluate fully the ways in which tensions, anxieties and desires are then articulated through cultural expression. Thus, it is only through reference to the social situation of women, the place of women, and the presentation of a 'preferred' femininity in post-war Britain that either discursive constructions of the female audience, or patterns of representations of

women in films of this time can be comprehended, since these elements rely upon one another for their meaning.

What such a consideration offers is the possibility of identifying the ways in which the nature of cinema-going, the types of films that were popular at particular times, and the forms of representations of women in certain films intersect with, and are influenced by, the changing social, historical, economic and ideological conditions of the wider social realm. The films I discuss, allow us to *see* the visualisation of dominant social, cultural and ideological structures, and also allow for an understanding of the relationship between certain films and their female audience. To address these issues is to think also about notions of female pleasure, but importantly here, it is also to try to understand how *ideas about* femininity and womanliness were articulated through visual culture.

This movement from and between a wide context (the period), to a narrower one (the gendering of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation and the consideration of women's social experience) has focused on the films in a particular way, and has identified specific, dominant themes. These are combined in a particular way in *Yield to the Night* and the reading and presentation of this film in Chapter 6 is one that is informed by the contextualisation provided in the preceding chapters but it is also a reading that has only been made possible *because of* the socio-historical work that precedes it.

Representations of *women* in British films of the 1940s and 1950s became the site for the re-figuration of patterns of consumption; modes of acceptable social behaviour; social and economic aspiration; and spatial and gender divisions of labour (vis-à-vis the re-alignment of the public and private, the concretisation of subjectivities that are grounded in and founded upon new patterns of consumption and display). This understanding is arrived at through the application of a range of different approaches to research and it is here, I believe, that it begins to be possible to see how inter-disciplinary work can be carried out: work that is both empirical and theoretical, in which the theoretical components are firmly grounded in empirical work into the material conditions of the period, and in which an empirical approach is not taken as an end in itself but is read through a theoretical lens. This is work which uses methods from social science, historical enquiry, textual analysis and critical theory, and is thus an attempt to reconcile a series of disciplinary perspectives.

This thesis is, then, also an argument for a particular approach to research - to the films, the discursive construction of the female audience, the critical discourses about film, the social context for film - all of these are also partly about looking for new routes by which to reach a destination. The destination may not be the expected one, but the *way* this destination is reached, and the unexpected or unusual questions that are thrown up along the way, has consequences for what we find when we get there.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Constructing the period 1945-1958 - Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation**

This chapter will provide a selective survey of the period 1945-1958 that will form the basis for subsequent analyses. These will focus down from the broader period to concentrate on the ways that prevailing social, cultural and ideological formations were influential in the production of dominant notions of femininity through the mid-1940s to the late-1950s. In particular, this chapter will clarify the foregrounding of 'Austerity', 'Affluence' and 'Americanisation', as terms with a vivid if flexible usage and contemporary currency, evident in a range of commentaries from the period. These establish the viability of the terms as a significant expression of a set of shared concerns and experiences from the period, but they also illustrate different responses to it. Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation refer to clusters of associated ideas summoning up the experience or perception, promise or threat of post-war reconstruction and cultural change. It will be shown that both Austerity and Affluence were responses to the material and economic conditions of social life, but that these, in turn, were overlaid by identifiable discursive practices that gave each a particular ideological 'function'. At the same time, the specific articulation of Americanisation that finds a voice throughout this period is also rooted in economic structures (Britain's dependence on the U.S.A. in the post-war period), but its entry into the ideological climate of

the mid-40s through to the late-50s, and its relation to both Austerity and Affluence, means that it functions as a discursive category with particular effects for the concerns of this project: it is in the ways that gender differences are constructed through Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation (and the tensions this creates), that we can trace the discursive production of post-war femininity. With this established it is possible to identify, in subsequent chapters, how 40s and 50s notions of womanliness, achieved in the interplay between Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation, are spoken through the dominant culture in a range of particular, popular texts.

### **Periodisation - Why 1945-1958?**

Focusing on a specific historical moment one immediately encounters the problems of periodisation since the identification and isolation of 'a history' for investigation is a process which would seem to be both arbitrary and productive. Arbitrary, in that one year is, in many ways, as good a starting or finishing point as any other; productive, in that to isolate a number of years for analysis is to discover peculiarities and continuities specific to those years. This thesis is confined to the period from January 1, 1945 to December 31, 1958, although its specific themes and continuities are ultimately less exact. Nor are these necessarily *the* prime organising principles throughout the period, but they are of particular pertinence to the concerns of this project.

For the period 1945-58 there is, I believe, a further complexity: these years span a time that shares both a uniformity and a heterogeneity of experience and attitude.

Fredric Jameson has written thus on the 'problems' of periodisation:

'Here...the "period" in question is understood not as some omnipresent and uniform shared style or way of thinking and acting, but rather as the sharing of an objective situation, to which a whole range of varied responses and creative innovations is then possible, but always within that situation's structural limits. Yet a whole range of rather different theoretical objections will also bear on the selectiveness of such a historical narrative: if the critique of periodisation questions the problems of diachrony, these involve the problems of synchrony and in particular the relationship to be established between the various "levels" of historical change singled out for attention.' (Jameson, 1988: 179)

The Jameson quotation speaks to the difficulties of tackling a section of historical time. More importantly, it articulates precisely the problems that have troubled feminist historians in particular: how to write a history that accounts both for changes in the social and cultural formation and examines the ways such shifts produce knowledge about sexual difference (without falling into the trap of privileging everything feminine, so that women simply replace men as the primary subjects of history whilst the question of the production of knowledge remains untouched).<sup>1</sup> In other words, historicisation needs to construct the period with an eye to both its structural conditions and the relations between its different registers and the conflicts and connections between selected aspects of its conditions. The solution to 'the problem' is not in abandoning historicisation but in

'...reorganizing its traditional procedures on a different level...the historian

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<sup>1</sup>See for instance, Kelly-Gadol, 1987: 15-28; Scott, 1988: 1-11; Humphreys et al, 1985: 42-8.

should reformulate her vocation - not any longer to produce some vivid representation of History "as it really happened," but rather to produce the *concept* of history.' (Jameson, 1988: 180, emphasis in original)

Accordingly, in addition to providing an outline of the pertinent aspects of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation as key components in, and for the purposes of establishing 1945-58 as *a period*, this chapter will also show the ways that dominant notions of femininity were held in place through their interrelations with these three discursive formations.

The period for 1945-58 was a transitional one, characterised by the tensions between competing and shifting ideological formations. These can be examined by looking at the ways that different aspects of the culture articulated and responded to elements of historical change across thirteen years. Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation can be considered as 'local' responses to an historical period characterised by changes in, for instance, Britain's status as a world power (the loss of Empire and the confirmation of this provided by Suez); a disrupted class system and the struggle over new structures of economic and social organisation and classification (both the real, material effects and the ideological thrust of Affluence); the eruption of renewed debates about the state of the national culture and how these, in turn, expressed anxieties about changes to traditional notions of Britishness. Where these shifts can be understood chronologically it is in the precise relationships between them, and the tensions created by these relationships, that we can glimpse the 'answers' to the questions of gender. Thus, the critique of diachrony - the selection and construction of narrative accounts of cause and effect

- is accepted from the perspective of a feminist account that attempts to highlight the construction of femininity in a culture that simultaneously marginalised women and focused on 'the feminine'. But the demands of this project necessitate a drawing of chronological boundaries and the identification of dominant themes. This is precisely the problem of synchrony; a snapshot across time that singles out particular historical changes must justify the focus. In this case, that means arguing that there are homologies and dominant trends across the period, that these are detectable from a number of different sources, and that they are demonstrable through analysis: first as a general contextualisation and then subsequently in relation to how these produced gendered subjects and specific expressions of femininity.

1945 provides an expedient starting point, representing a moment of flux, of changed attitudes and post-war expectations that facilitated the following period of social, political and cultural re-organisation. More important for subsequent chapters, 1945 marks the beginnings of the construction of a post-war femininity that, as outlined in Chapter 1, follows a trajectory moving from Celia Johnson's genteel, middle-class womanliness in *Brief Encounter* (1945) to the over-determined and uncontrollable femininity represented by Diana Dors in *Yield to the Night* (1956). The ways that women were addressed by Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation and the relations between these terms and dominant notions of femininity, is expanded in what follows.



In two events that occurred a matter of weeks apart - between May 8 (V.E. Day) and July 26 (the General Election) - the Second World War was declared 'over', and Britain had a new Government; for the first time in British history a Labour Government had been elected with an absolute majority. The result of the 1945 election signalled widespread support for a programme of radical reform represented in Labour's pledges to reconstruct and reorganise the social structure of Britain. The following three extracts indicate different aspects of post-war days: jubilation in peace and a recognition of the need for continued collective endeavour and sacrifice; one woman's recollection of the opportunities represented by the post-war re-settlement; and in contrast, the fears of the conservative press about the possibility of radical political change.

"It is a victory of the cause of freedom in every land. In all our great history we have never seen a greater day than this. Everyone, man and woman, has done his bit. Everyone has tried. The long years nor the dangers, nor the fierce attacks of the enemy have in any way weakened the unbending resolve of the British nation." (Winston Churchill, VE Day speech. Extract from *The Daily Mirror*, May 9, 1945.)

"For my generation [the post-war period] was a great time of educational opportunity...I benefitted from the results of the 1944 Education Act, I took the 11-plus and went to Grammar School...They were years of great growth and enlightenment." (P. Brandreth)

"GESTAPO IN BRITAIN IF SOCIALISTS WIN - They would dictate what to say and do, even where to queue." (*Daily Express* headline, June 5, 1945.)

The social and cultural changes that came to fruition in 1945 did not simply manifest themselves overnight. They were clearly a result of years of cumulative dissatisfactions and frustrations and, perhaps, an indication of new expectations

and desires that reveal the mood of Britain at the end of the war. As Peter

Calvocoressi had suggested:

“...the Conservatives were defeated by more than the record of the past. There were also hopes for the future which, no less than the record, pointed to the Labour Party which was expected to change everything that anybody thought was wrong about Britain...The electorate hoped and believed that the Labour Party would make great strides towards the elimination of absolute poverty and excessive inequality whereas the Conservatives could be expected only to meander towards these goals.” (Calvocoressi, 1978: 9)

Whilst the watershed of 1945 is hard to avoid as a marker for the beginning of the period, the end is harder to map; no less dramatic in their effects, the social and cultural changes of the mid- to late-1950s span two to three years and represent a diverse range of socio-economic and cultural shifts linked to changed expectations and desires.<sup>2</sup> We might include here, the establishment of the first commercial

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<sup>2</sup>The following provides a range of examples that demonstrate a variety of cultural and political responses to the changes that achieved expression around the years 1956-8. Whilst there is a level of ambiguity here about the exact closure of the period in terms of a precise date (and this relates to issues concerning the nature of periodisation and its ‘problems’; see note 3 below, for examples of differences of opinion about the duration of ‘Austerity’, for instance), the choice of 1958 is not ambiguous or arbitrary. The examples presented here to account for the ending of the period do span a number of years but are identified as 1958; on the one hand it is necessary to provide a ‘moment of resolution’, whilst, on the other, this somehow evades precision. As argued above (45), this project demands that boundaries are drawn, yet the nature of the issues under investigation here makes this task a tricky one. If it is accepted that the focus of the thesis is the (re)construction of post-war femininity, then the attention paid to the early part of the period represents a perceived need to consider how appropriate femininity and womanliness are constructed in the immediate post-war years (and, subsequently, how this is represented in films from the period which focus on transitional historical and cultural moments, as well as transitional femininities). Similarly, the somewhat extended moment of closure also reflects a perceived necessity to be able to identify a moment at which it can be argued that it is possible to recognise a **conceptual**, as well as historical, resolution of the discursive femininities of the post-war years in particular, and of certain socio-economic and cultural shifts also.

television station in September of 1955 (at first only available in the London area) which “brought with it a strain of garishness and Americanisation that to English viewers...was quite new” (Booker, 1970 (1969): 37); the ‘disturbances’ by cinema-going Teddy Boys which followed screenings of *The Blackboard Jungle* in September 1955, and *Rock Around the Clock* which apparently precipitated a series of riots during August and September of 1956; the production of *Look Back in Anger* in 1956; the ‘Suez Crisis’ of 1956; the final abolition of the last vestiges of rationing in the same year with the release of all controls on meat consumption; the publication of Richard Hoggart’s *Uses of Literacy* in 1957, and the growing number of critiques of contemporary culture, notably the foundation, in 1957, of *Universities’ and Left Review*. Further indications of social change towards the end of the fifties were Macmillan’s attestation, in 1957, of widespread prosperity and

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The year 1958 is no more nor less exact than the starting point of 1945; where the latter sees the ending of the Second World War and the beginnings of attempts to reconstruct Britain both physically and psychically, the former represents a moment at which the shifts of the previous years had become sufficiently embedded in the socio-economic, cultural and conceptual frameworks of the period to be taken as ‘lived experiences’ of the time - if you like, the moment at which the transition from Austerity the Affluence is ‘reported’ as widely experienced. This is, of course, not unrelated to my analyses of films from the period; as I argue, it is in relation to two films from the latter part of the period (*Yield to the Night*, 1956, and *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, 1957) that it is possible to identify, first some sort of resolution to the discursive femininities of the post-war years and, second, a quantifiable difference in the presentation and treatment of femininity in British films (see Conclusion). Since the presentation of these is embedded in an understanding of their context, it is essential that this context is one that is identifiable as ‘established’. Whilst the years between 1945 and 1958 may be years of transition and instability, the boundaries placed upon these by periodisation are intended to mark the limits for a range of identifiable contextual markers that can be seen to have impacted on representations of femininities.

material wealth (albeit, accompanied by a warning of the possible dangers of inflation and reservations that things might be 'too good'), and the removal of all controls on Hire Purchase spending in October 1958 lifting a series of restrictions imposed earlier in the decade.

"It is said that Lord Poole, one of Macmillan's most astute and influential party managers, used to drive on a Saturday from his country home to nearby Watford. Here he observed the changing moods of the suburb by watching people shopping in the new supermarkets, enjoying the opportunities they had never had before, absorbed in the rickety world of hire-purchase, intent on becoming owners of a television or a cut-price (imported) washing machine." (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970: 77)

Clearly, Britain in 1958 was not the same society as it had been in 1945; this period of rapid transformation occurred on a number of different fronts and threw up different effects. Importantly, these centre around shifting modes of consumption and they had quite particular consequences for post-war femininity.

The following sections address the question of the social, economic, political and cultural changes in Britain through looking at the place of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation in Britain throughout the period, and will establish the particularities and nuances of these terms as they will be used throughout subsequent chapters. Each section is prefaced by a selection of quotations that originate from contemporary sources such as speeches and statements by politicians, headlines and articles from newspapers and magazines, cartoons, and commentaries, plus comments and recollections from the questionnaires initiated by this project.

## Austerity



"Brightly shone the moon that night,  
Tho' the frost was cruel,  
Extra brightly just to spite  
The Minister of Fuc-oo-cl." 24.12.46

Illustration 1

"If we are to build up the prosperity of the country and raise the general standard of living to the level at which we should aim we shall have to devote in the first years of peace a large part of our resources to reconditioning the old and providing new capital equipment needed by industry. At the same time goods of all kinds must be produced for export. We cannot therefore, expect to produce for our own consumption and use in the abundance and variety which we should like in the months and years immediately ahead. It follows that if our first needs are to be met first the patriotic citizen should for a time restrain himself from spending his current earnings as freely as he would like." (Osbert Peake, Financial Secretary to the Treasury, November 1944, cited in *The Labour Party Speakers' Handbook*, 1948-9: 107-8.)

"We don't promise ease and comfort; we don't offer you presents. What we offer is the opportunity for every man and woman to use their capacity to the full, whether at work or in the home." (Jim Griffiths, Chairman of the Labour Party, 18 June 1945, *ibid.*: 108)

"While we have been fighting we have been hard put to it, and we shall be after the war to get enough produced to support and protect our people. We need the same determination and self-sacrifice, and the same sense of values that have brought us to victory in the war. We know and we

emphasise the difficulties that lie ahead, but we know too that the ordinary men and women of this country can overcome them if they will.” (Sir Stafford Cripps, 20 June 1945, *ibid.*)

“The war is over; the conditions of war in some respects continue. You need only make a long railway journey in England to become aware of it...No food on the train. No cup of tea to be got at the stops because the queues for this remarkable beverage masquerading as tea were impossibly long...At Newcastle...No taxi to be got. My hotel towel is about the size of a pocket handkerchief, the soap tablet is worn to the thinness of paper, my bed sheets are torn.” (J.L. Hodson, diary entry for 24 August 1945, cited in Marwick, 1982: 22)

‘The process of turning over from war to peace is proceeding smoothly and quickly. It will mean a certain slackening of “austerity” at home, but for the present it would be unwise to expect a large flow of goods for individual consumption in this country...The first and essential task which faces this nation is to get on its feet by means of the export trade. To live, to pay our way and to regain our position in the world, we must sell our goods abroad...As industry develops there will be more and more things available for the consumer at home.’ (*Daily Mirror* January 4, 1946.)

“Starve with Strachey, and Shiver with Shinwell” (Opposition Party slogan, early 1947, cited in Cooper, Sissons and French, 1986 (1963): 36-7)

“In 1945 after the war, my hubby and I was in lodgings till 1953, but we were told like many other couples we would be given priority, with both of us being in the armed forces. It was then and only then I felt cheated...” (D. Barker)



"My dear Ethel, if you had ever studied economics you would realise that it's only the fact that things are more expensive which makes you think the cost of living has gone up." 23.v.47

Illustration 2

'I think that everyone thought that after the war ended and rationing was finally over, that it was going to be "different" when in fact it was a long time before everything did change.' (M. Pay)



"You mark my words! A few more days of this and the Government'll start telling us: 'Less Water Now Means Better Living Sooner'." 31.v.47

Illustration 3

In 1942, wartime austerity measures were strengthened and extended; limitations on petrol for 'pleasure motoring', a reduction in the clothes ration, the rationing of soap, sweets and chocolate and the curtailment of sporting events were added to the myriad of other items and foods already on points (see Calder, 1982: 317-26).

As Angus Calder suggests, the tightening of rationing in 1941-2

"...was a long overdue measure, prompted by much public criticism of the unfair distribution of unrationed foods, and it was at once extremely popular. People knew that the well-to-do could no longer corner all the tinned salmon, for instance, by paying fancy prices." (Calder, 1982: 318).

The wartime distribution system of rationing food and so on was clearly seen as a necessary and democratic measure that ensured each citizen had equal shares even if they were meagre. The cessation of war was replaced by another war; the 'war to win the peace'. It is evident in the extracts cited above that politicians were preparing the populace for a continuation of hardship and sacrifice and in 1947, following the severe winter and ensuing fuel crisis, plus the demands of Britain's American Loan Agreement,

"...the Government announced a programme of cuts and austerities. The miners were to work an extra half-hour a day; food imports...were to be cut; the basic petrol ration was to be reduced by one third. On August 23rd, the meat ration was cut, public dinners were restricted, foreign travel was suspended and the basic petrol ration was abolished." (Marquand, 1986 (1963): 158-9)

Although necessitated by economic crisis, such measures were not 'at once extremely popular'; for instance *Picture Post's* April 19 issue focused on the question "What's Wrong with Britain" and clearly expressed the tension between optimism and frustration that was so characteristic of Britain at this time:



"If only the war would end, we used to say. And then one day it was over. There was a great surge of happiness. For a day, the world was young again. We had won the greatest war and solved the greatest problem of all, the problem of keeping alive, as individuals and as a nation...What else did we expect, that happy day? We were happy because we thought that now we would go back to what we called normal - peace time homes, jobs, habits, an easier, fuller way of life. Today, we all feel we have not gone as far along that road as we hoped then. What has gone wrong?"

Nevertheless, a 1947 article in *Picture Post* which focused on the respective food situations in Denmark, France, Belgium, Italy and Greece in comparison with Britain, makes much of the perceived benefits of Britain's rationing system in the post-war years:

"...No other country has a ration system that ensures regular and equitable distribution of so many basic foods to all people of all classes at a price within everyone's reach....People in all the countries we visited spoke to me with admiration of the British food system...They...point out that the British rationing system was introduced during the war as a patriotic and vital necessity when most people in Europe were learning to sabotage food regulations...Some people add almost wistfully that the British are more disciplined and have a better morale." ("How Britain Fares", November 1, 1947)

The issues of British 'discipline' and 'morale' are important here as they indicate the construction of Austerity in relation to ideas about the nation and the national character that are reflected in the ways that Austerity measures were presented to the population - as a continuation of wartime necessity and as vital for the recovery of national pride. However, where *Picture Post* may have attempted to evoke the egalitarian and democratising principles of post-war rationing, for most people the themes of austerity - hardship and sacrifice - seemed no longer to be tempered by either the exigencies of war or the optimism that accompanied V.E. Day.

"Few bonfires were lit on the first anniversary of V.E. Day: May 8th 1946.

Although it was declared a public holiday, the mood of the British people was one not of festivity but of bleak resignation, with a faint rebelliousness at the restrictions and looming crises that hung over them like a fog.” (Cooper, 1986 (1963): 30)

“The miracle that had been dreamed of somehow never took place. People had expected happiness to come like the sun; they were run down and resentful at being told it was something to be worked for.” (Ross, 1950, no pagination).

Even staples of the wartime diet now seemed threatened; dried egg vanished from the shops in early 1946 and in July of the same year it was announced that bread - safe even at the height of the war - was to be rationed:

“By March 1948 seven hundred and fifty Food Officers and other staff in Food Offices throughout the country were dealing full-time with bread rationing alone. And for two years the public juggled irritably with the pieces of paper that meant bread or flour or buns; beginning for the first time to blame their frustrations and sense of gloom not only on the externals like war or famine, but squarely on their Government. It was, perhaps, a sign that we were properly back at peace.” (Cooper, op. cit.: 30, see also 25-30)

Austerity is thus identifiable through reference to an economic and material reality, a continuation or even increase of wartime shortages and hardships imposed upon a population already exhausted by years of total war. There is disagreement amongst political and social historians and commentators as to the duration and uniformity of Austerity as a major influence in Britain in the post-war years.<sup>3</sup> However, it is

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<sup>3</sup>For instance, Sissons & French (1986) characterise *The Age of Austerity* as between 1945 and 1951; Bogdanor & Skidelsky (1970) similarly argue that ‘affluence’ began in 1951; Marwick argues that the whole of the 1945-1957 period is marked by ‘austerity’; and Sked & Cook (1986) in their political history employ different periodisation criteria, arguing that 1962-4 are the years that mark the ending of a period of political and social stability. In addition, Marwick suggests that the effects of Austerity were geographically specific; areas such as the North-East of England benefitted from the expansion of

not the precise delimitation of Austerity that is the main issue here, what is important is to outline a sense of the texture of the immediate post-war years as a time of Austerity in order to provide a coherent working definition. Thus far, Austerity is clearly marked by the economic and material conditions that gave rise to a number of Government policies and measures that were designed to 'win the peace'. It is not so clearly a marked or systematised ideological force in the same way that Affluence can be understood and it is perhaps because of this that Austerity is conceptually rather imprecise. For whilst Austerity is identifiable as an economic phase that precipitated a shared experience of material and social conditions, it is also a period suffused with ambiguity. It is possible to talk about the social depression and boredom that seemed to permeate the culture in the years after V.E. Day (see, for instance, Cooper and Ross above), but at the same time the early part of the period is imbued also with a sense of political anticipation and hope. In other words, there is a disparity between the real (material and economic) conditions of people's existence and the imagined conditions of the immediate post-war period and the foreseeable future (the political project of the newly

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heavy industries throughout wartime, whilst some of the rural areas of the North of Scotland had suffered a loss of population during the war from which they seemed unlikely to recover; the coal mining areas of South Yorkshire and the East Midlands grew, whilst the textile industries of West Yorkshire never recovered from the ravages of the 1930s (see Marwick, 1982: 26-37). Marwick's claims are somewhat persuasive, however, it is also the case that rationing was universal. Whilst some areas may have escaped the worst ravages of wartime bombing, post-war unemployment and housing shortages, it must also be recognised that the whole nation was subject to the same Government policies and that the effect of these must have been felt equally across the majority of the nation.

elected Labour government and the infection of the population with the spirit of a progressive political democratism). Nor is it the case that these two are mutually exclusive, as Sissons and French write in their introduction:

“In the growing prosperity of the Fifties there was perhaps a conscious turning away from memories of the days of rationing and shortages. And in many ways the atmosphere of the post-war years is incredibly remote. It is difficult to recall a time when so much idealism was in the air... when T.V. was only a metropolitan toy, ball-point pens a source of wonder, and long-playing records a transatlantic rumour. Nevertheless, for all the talk of austerity, this was an exciting time, with a strong flavour of its own. As a period it is much of a piece...from the spiv and the squatter to the New Look and the Lynskey Tribunal... The great social experiment that was being conducted gave rise to a sense of crusading idealism, and to virtually all a feeling of involvement in national affairs which was to become muffled in the following decade.” (Sissons & French, 1986 (1963): xvii)

Similarly, this extract from one of the questionnaire respondents exemplifies how optimism was sustained throughout the hardships that characterised the immediate post-war years:

‘I honestly believe that as a result of 1945 we were on a great “high”. “Anything goes,” we said. We were politically active and open to any progressive ideas that were going.’ (J. Cadogan)

Both this woman and P. Brandreth (cited above, 45) clearly reaped benefits from the ‘new’ democratic state, and it has been argued that Britain was democratised not only through the new social and welfare structures established in the post-war years, but that the Second World War itself had played an important part in the disruption of traditional and deep rooted inequalities. The quotation from Calder above (52) for instance, suggests that a powerful egalitarian impulse existed during the war, albeit born of necessity, and Harry Hopkins (1964) writes about the democratisation of the armed forces through a comprehensive and far-reaching

education programme that disrupted the class-ridden and strictly hierarchical structures which prevailed throughout the First World War and into the thirties.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, David Hughes, in *The Spiv*, and Pearson Phillips, in *The New Look*, respectively, identify an altogether different facet of the period:

“While many people were putting up with the hardships in the name of a social revolution that would pay off handsomely later, the spivs - and their countless accomplices among ordinary people - by-passed the House of Commons and contrived a revolution of their own. A crime wave? Perhaps. But, though everyone expected to see the figures wobble down after a few years, this did not happen. The spivs, in fact, were not merely the harbingers and outward sign of a crime wave, which the law would stamp out in due time, but a much more disturbing indication that times in England had finally changed.” (Hughes, 1986 (1963): 87)

‘As 1946 shivered into 1947...the mood of freshness, hope and optimism began to fade, and gave way to concern and despair. The word “new” lost some of its glamour...the Bishop of Fulham made a much publicised statement. “We are just drifting,” he said. “We cannot see the end of it all.” Possibly the only strand of hope running through those miserable winter days was provided by the Heinz advertisement: “They’re coming back, those fifty-seven varieties, one by one...” They were about the only things that were. An advertisement for tonic wine asked: “How does she get that pre-war feeling?” The answer: “By drinking the wine that does you good.” A few months earlier the question would have been: “How does she get that post-war feeling...?” But the V.E. Day draught had been drained.’ (Phillips, 1986 (1963): 120-1)

In addition Alan Ross delivers a contemporary commentary that articulates the contradictory experiences of the years immediately following the war:

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<sup>4</sup>For instance, the distribution of the *Beveridge Report*, in the form of an *Army Bureau of Current Affairs* pamphlet, its withdrawal and subsequent re-issue as a result of protests provides a useful indication of the involvement of members of the Armed Forces in events ‘at home’, see Hopkins, Harry, 1964: 18-21. ‘Some people, indeed, believed that the Bureau had won the forces’ votes for Labour, and Churchill himself after 1945 asserted that the army had “had a big say” in his defeat.’ (Sked & Cook (1986): 19).

“The Labour Government came in on a full tide of hope and promise, a tide that caught but then failed to hold the imagination. A rising and ambitious programme of social security and greater social equality, of nationalisation and food subsidies, seemed and then grew too good to last in a falling world. There was too much new wine for a society condemned too long to drinking out of old bottles. The Labour crisis was not a failure of the imagination. It was a crisis over which the seasons passed only to give it a new and particular shape; over which apathy spread like a skin that, in a world of controlled markets and involuntary debts, began to turn septic.” (Ross, 1950: no pagination)

This combination of tiredness and optimism, boredom and utopianism, is perhaps best understood in relation to what was a newly determined political climate:

“...almost behind the scenes, the greatest social revolution in English history had taken place...There were no homes for heroes, but a living wage, social security and a National Health Service...a war-weary people leaned expectantly on the broad shoulders of the state and hoped to be held up.”(Ross, *ibid.*)

The Welfare State did hold up its citizens and the impact of the establishment of the National Health Service and social security systems cannot be underestimated:

‘...to most people, the heart of the “social revolution”, the true gospel of 1945, lay...in the Beveridge Reforms...The true potency of “Beveridge” was...psychological and political rather than fiscal. It could be summed up in the single word “comprehensiveness”...Since the benefits offered under the Acts now covered a wide range of normal contingencies and since all males and single women of working age from Mayfair to Mile End were now obliged to stick their stamps on their cards...It was no longer possible to think in the old “two-nation” terms of “the dole.”’ (Hopkins, 1964: 126. See also 113-90 for an account of the different effects and aspects of the ‘social revolution.’)

The security offered by the Welfare State and the egalitarian principles on which Welfarism rested constitute the biggest change in the immediate post-war years. Although 1948 may have seen to fruition the most fundamental reforms in social reconstruction and reorganisation, in another sense it seems that the ‘war for the

peace' was bound for failure. A number of economic and political factors seemed to conspire to ensure the failure of the new Labour Government's plans for the reconstruction and reorganisation of the fabric of British society in the immediate post-war years. For instance, the withdrawal of the American 'Lend Lease' agreement,<sup>5</sup> the dilapidated state of British manufacturing industries after the thirties, the run-down state of the transport system, general shortages of fuel and industrial products within a system which had been geared to production for the 'war effort'; all of these, compounded by the severe weather conditions of the winter of 1946-1947, in the end produced the sentiments and disappointments voiced in the various comments and responses cited above and summed up by Calvocoressi thus:

'The end of the war seemed a splendid moment for a new start, and so it was psychologically, but in practical terms it was not. The programme was huge. It needed a lot of money and - depending on the money available - time, whereas the elation of victory and the pressures for derationing, demobilisation and reform demanded that much be done in no time at all ... Unable to live of its own, Britain was left without the manufacturers and the foreign cash with which it had been used to pay for food and other imported raw materials. During the war Roosevelt's secretary of the treasury, Henry Morgenthau, had judged that Britain was "busted" and yet Britain aimed to recover its prewar position by reducing and renewing its industries.' (1978: 9-10)

It is perhaps in this tension between optimism and tiredness that we can locate what seems to be the primary defining characteristic of Austerity, particularly if we

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<sup>5</sup>The Lend Lease agreement between Britain and the United States had been introduced in 1941. This allowed Britain to order American arms and other supplies, but to pay for them at a later date. When the war ended, Truman discontinued the agreement, leaving Britain with a heavy debt due: "Paying now meant not buying, and not buying meant no recovery." (Calvocoressi, op. cit.: 11)

consider the position of women in relation to the 'new' society of post-war Britain. One thing that is obvious about Austerity is that it was 'about' rationing. But it is more than this, it is also about the evocation of the 'traditional' British qualities of stoicism, doggedness and loyalty. This gives Austerity a peculiarly 'old-fashioned' flavour that could be understood not as the price of changes wrought to Britain's national identity as a result of W.W.II, but as a refusal of change especially as this was reflected in class relations. One consequence of the war was that Britain was 'left behind' America in terms of its status as a world power. Whilst this can be exemplified through a newly inflected articulation of fears about 'the threat of Americanisation' which focus on the projected 'loss' of a coherent and familiar national identity (see below), it is also possible to see this in terms of a refusal to acknowledge or accept the *need* for change in order to maintain status in terms of manufacturing and trading. It has been pointed out that one of the consequences of the Second World War for Britain was a democratisation of British society; in terms of what this means it is useful to think about how this was articulated in Austerity in relation to issues of class and power.

The election of the 1945 Labour Government was seen as disastrous by sections of the population (as exemplified by the *Daily Express* headline cited above, 45) and since one of the primary appeals of Labour had been to democratisation and egalitarianism it is possible to see how this could have been viewed as a potentially damaging shift to the dominant classes. This, in a sense, is also a fear of change, specifically a fear of modernisation and modernity, and perhaps the most striking



sign of this process of modernisation was the changed position of women.

Throughout the war women had worked hard and had shown a capacity for flexibility that, one guesses, may have been surprising to many, although not to women themselves as the following selection of extracts from the questionnaires suggest:

“I learned quite a lot about how other people lived and the way some people’s lives were planned for them. For instance women were allowed to do jobs that in peace time wouldn’t have been thought of. Like lorry driving, flying, motor repairing, fire fighting, rifle shooting. In fact a whole new way of life, instead of staying at home looking after children and washing and cleaning, women were in fact, leading a life of their own and using their own intuition. In other words, things were changing and women were real people instead of housebound slaves.” (I. King)

“I was too young to judge on the freedom issue as I started the war years as a child of 10 and finished it as a woman of 16 already at work for two years as such I was most probably over-confident and totally determined that I was not going to become the resentful person that my mother was, playing second fiddle to my father out of a misplaced sense of duty ruined her life...” (J. Astell)

Yet where these women express a consciousness of change and of possibilities it is important to acknowledge the place of this within a wider picture. Where it is easy to see that women’s position had changed it is also necessary to recognise that these responses are individual ones and represent only half of the story; other comments from the questionnaires present a quite different experience of the same situation.

“Things were difficult in the post-war period...as we still had rationing...We had lived in a mad whirl during the war years.” (M. Meidl)

“...at the very beginning...It was a very austere time and there was virtually none of the modern household domestic appliances or home entertainments apart from the radio...We were all brought up with the idea that woman’s

place was in the home, housewife and mother..." (P. Adams)

If we consider these recollections in relation to the more generally broadcast official statements and policies of the time we can see how the experiences expressed in these two extracts reflect the presentation of Austerity and women's place within it. In chapter 3 I look at the question of how women were positioned in relation to employment and the ways this put strain on notions of femininity, primarily focused around the issue of woman as citizen (worker) versus woman as mother/housewife. Here I want to outline how the place of women in Austerity Britain can be seen as a way of talking about the changed constituency of the post-war nation. Primarily this focuses on attempts to address the shifting class structure and relations that resulted from the Labour victory in 1945 and the ways this can be seen to have disrupted dominant ideologies and class formations. The question of modernity is central here since it was the newly defined position of women (as a way of talking about a 'new' class structure and shifting masculinities) that was one of the 'problems' for post-war Britain. Thus, the ways that women were both positioned within and addressed by Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation are central to understanding the re-construction of post-war femininities. For Austerity, this was bound up with notions of women's roles and conceptions of womanliness that were tied to questions of nation and nationhood, and which invoked the figure of woman as a sort of repository of moral and social responsibility. (This will be exemplified later in relation to selected films, especially *Turn the Key Softly*, 1953.) The womanly woman was a signifier of a

pre-war hierarchy and moral order in which the 'responsible' or 'respectable' working-classes could be relied upon to cope with adversity and maintain loyalty to the Nation. Whilst women's lives were shaped by the material demands of economic austerity, it is also the case that their place in post-war society was shaped by Austerity, by the appeals of an ideology that attempted to contain the dislocations that had resulted from the War. In her book on women's magazines, Janice Winship has written of the ways that magazines such as *Woman* and *Woman's Own* can be seen as part of a process of re-evaluation that reflected real changes in women's lives and how these were accounted for in the pages of national women's weeklies:

"...the face of womanhood in the late 1940s looked both inwards to the family and outwards to the public world of work and the concerns of the nation...Indeed it was the foregrounding of the nation's needs over those of the individual and family that licensed, as it had during the war, a limited questioning of traditional femininity. Britain was exhorted to be a nation of families each selflessly doing their bit for king and country - and the dollar drive. And that meant women too." (Winship, 1987: 30-1)

Where Winship claims a feminism of sorts for *Woman* and similar magazines in the mid- to late-1940s (see *ibid.*: 30), if we turn to the pages of another mass circulation magazine such as *Picture Post*, the representation of womanliness in Austerity becomes more contradictory - there may be elements of Winship's 'incipient feminism' in some of the comments in the following extract, but these are tempered by an over-arching framework that places women in a precise relationship to wider social structures. The April 19, 1947 issue of *Picture Post* concentrated on the exploration of Britain's post-war crisis, focusing first on the

question *As the WOMAN in the HOME sees the Crisis* - this is cited at length

because it exemplifies the difficulties presented by and for femininity at this time.

'Mrs. Jones doesn't care a damn for economics....trade pacts, imports and exports are just so many words...sandwiched between the much more exciting and readable reports of "The Toy Boat Case" and "What the Stars Foretell."...We won the war. We expected an easier time. Why is it so much worse? Why are we so short? [Mrs. Jones] finds there is less food for the family...She believes (probably wrongly) that there are less goods in the shops. She is bitterest of all over the fuel shortage...She is fed up with queuing. she can't see why they can't build more houses...And she hates the rudeness, the drabness she meets everywhere - though Mrs. Jones herself, in her exasperation, is contributing to both...her beloved radio [is] at sixes and sevens...Food is difficult, but it can just be managed; and she could always provide enough for the children by going short herself. But to see them looking pinched with cold was a misery - and her own spirits fell to zero after hours spent between a frozen outdoors and a chilly house...The soap shortage is her next big worry, with the position worse, and the ration smaller than it was during the war. Mrs. Jones, who does her own washing, finds it impossible to keep the house, the linen and the baby's things clean on the soap ration - so something has to go dirty...She has a profound feeling that no one really cares about women and what happens to them. They can't protest; they can't go on strike; so they always get the worst of it. She felt a malicious pleasure when shaving soap ran short, as it was the first masculine essential to go off the market. Why should there be beer and tobacco when there's no Farex for the baby? Mrs. Jones also has a few words to say about quality... "They say all that goes for export," she says. "Why can't we have some of it here?" Her niece, Jessie Brown, said the same when she heard that all the nice jumpers were made for America... Well, who does Mrs. Jones blame for all these troubles? Certainly not the Socialists...No, the objects of her spleen are not Atlee, Cripps or Bevan, but a mysterious body known as "they." "They" are the officials, the people who push her around, who have her life in their power, from the booby at the Trade Board who says there is no pram shortage, to the snappy spinster at the Food Office...she also - for the first time in her life - blames her own class. She blames the men who don't want to work. She herself works from six in the morning to eleven at night, when the baby is put down after his last feed. Yet the men are fussing over every extra half-hour...She works seven days a week - why can't the men do five-and-a-half? And the last straw is that "they" want her to go back into industry again, on top of all her own work...And shutting down day nurseries at the same time!...She wants more leisure and more colour, as well as more food and clothes and less wearying work. But most of all she wants hope. That is why she is

sadder now than during the war. Then there was always a target, Victory. Today, no one has tried to show her how or when the break may come. "I wouldn't mind all the work," she says, "if only I could see an end to it."...' (*Picture Post*, April 19, 1947.)

There are several key aspects here to the constituency of post-war womanliness: the placing of women in the home (domesticity and motherhood); the evocation of the struggles presented to Britons in the late-40s that centre around the provision and availability of 'basic' goods; the place of paid employment in women's already difficult lives; the questions of leisure and enjoyment. We can see here that one of the 'functions' fulfilled by Mrs. Jones is to represent a very particular picture of womanhood: an 'ordinary', working-class mother and wife who is struggling to maintain standards (of cleanliness, comfort and a sort of determination to do the correct thing) over a prolonged period of hardship.

I would argue that the figure of Mrs. Jones is thus presented as a template for post-war, working-class woman; the class status of Mrs. Jones is important here since it is the working-class woman who is the 'cause' of 'the problem' (we shall see in Chapter 4 how this 'problem' is not so severe for the middle-class woman, who is differently placed in relation to post-war femininity). It is the working-classes who are, in a sense, most 'feared', but who are also relied upon to maintain the status quo: that is, it is the working-classes who are addressed by Austerity, and working-class women who are seen to be in many ways most important as representatives of a stability and continuity that is central to the maintenance of the social fabric. The way that the family is privileged here is

important also; whilst the article, and indeed the whole of this issue of *Picture Post*, recognises the need for a collective effort to re-establish Britain's manufacturing and thus trading base, this touches Mrs. Jones' life only in so far as it is yet another stress placed upon her.

There is an 'old-fashionedness' about Mrs. Jones and the world of women she represents; a sort of harking back to a pre-war and wartime, pre-modern, solid and dependable citizenship, where everyone knew what their priorities were and the concept of nationhood was not nearly so problematic: a country of hard-working, tenacious individuals, bound together by a common purpose. The refusal of change is a refusal to accept, primarily, the changed class organisation of Britain and it is femininity that is 'used' to articulate these fears and tensions. Torn between the demands of family and the world of paid work, struggling to maintain minimum standards of decency, Mrs. Jones is a nostalgic repository of traditional working-classness. One of the ways this is presented is in relation to Mrs. Jones' resourcefulness and prudence: the management of the household budget is a major responsibility for her, and a source of tension. Her role as mother and housewife cannot be questioned since she clearly puts the well-being of her children above her own, her role as a prudent and thrifty consumer is secured by the inclusion of her niece, Jessie Brown, who represents not simply the carefree figure of a young woman, but another aspect of post-war femininity; immature, narcissistic and trivial (this is important to notions of Americanisation and is a constant trope in films of the time, see below and Chapter 4). Thus, another tension is introduced

into the construction of post-war femininity: the 'requirement' for femininity to provide some sort of 'relief' from the drab and stark conditions of life, to be 'feminine', or rather to conform to dominant notions of what femininity 'should be':

“Young, pretty, and usually cheerful, [Jessie Brown] feels almost desperate for a few pretty things, particularly stockings and shoes. She says the brightest spot is that there are plenty of cosmetics. She nearly died during the war when she was without a lipstick for months.” (ibid.)

The world of womanhood is secured through the evocation of the 'responsible', mature and domestic Mrs. Jones in opposition to the 'cheerful' and carefree Jessie Brown; that Jessie will 'become' Mrs. Jones is by no means certain (especially given the role assigned to women in Affluence) but that she should aspire to it is implicit. In a sense, Jessie Brown represents the emergence of a modern femininity that was articulated through the female figure and representations of her, that was centred around the presentation of femininity in relation to patterns of consumption and that was to reach full expression in debates around 'proper' femininity in the 1950s.

This modernity is problematic for British culture and hinges on debates about Affluence and Americanisation; Mrs. Jones then becomes a sort of attempt to foreground a traditional, stable but out-moded notion of woman. Moreover, working-class womanhood is used as a way of articulating the discursive production of dominant and recalcitrant class relations, for middle-class femininity does not come under the same sort of scrutiny. If the ways that working-class

femininity is framed by Austerity demonstrate attempts to contain and shape the image of post-war woman into an old-fashioned figure, then the presentation of middle-class femininity is unproblematic in so far as it embodies the dominant formation of womanliness. Nevertheless, there is an aspect of this that creates difficulties for Austerity and this also centres around notions of consumption and modes of 'appropriate' or 'proper' behaviour.

One way of approaching the address to middle-class femininity and its negotiation is through looking at the presentation of the 'New Look'. In the context of the economic situation of Britain in the immediate post-war years - continued rationing, crippling loan arrangements with the U.S.A., struggling industry and a severely damaged infrastructure - the presentation of the New Look in 1947 became a controversial issue:

'A few minutes after ten-thirty on the morning of February 12th, 1947, a young English woman heard for the first time in her life what she afterwards described as "the sound of a petticoat." At last, at long last, she felt that the Second World War was really over...Within a year that sound of rustling petticoats could be heard right round Europe and America, supporting the long, full skirts of the fashion that was launched that February morning, the fashion which later became known as "The New Look"...A fashion which gathered some secret momentum of its own, and swept off to be very much more than a style of dress - a state of mind, an attitude to the times, and, eventually, a burnt-out cliché. It also, in Britain at any rate, became a subject of controversy. It was what is called "an issue," and the way the British people reacted to it tells us something about the thoughts, feelings and desires of those times.'

(Phillips, op. cit.: 117)

The controversy surrounding The New Look can be exemplified by turning to the pages of *Picture Post* once again, and to an article published in September 1947:



“PARIS FORGETS THIS IS 1947

Straight from the indolent and wealthy years before the 1914 war come this year's much-discussed Paris fashions. They are launched upon a world which has not the material to copy them - and whose women have neither the money to buy, the leisure to enjoy, nor in some designs even the strength to support, these masses of elaborate material...

Entering the salons of the haute couture from the chestnut-lined boulevards, where the average Parisian woman looks no better dressed than her London counterpart, one steps back into another age...We are back to the days when fashion was the prerogative of the leisured, wealthy woman and not the everyday concern of typist, saleswoman or housewife...whether you see in it a sensational bid to recapture the American market, or a cynical disregard for the world-wide shortage of textiles, there can be no question about the entire unsuitability of these new fashions for our present life and times.

Already in America demonstrations have been staged in revolt against the return of the long skirt. In this country they are simply an economic impossibility.” (*Picture Post*, September 27, 1947.)

These comments on ‘The New Look’ demonstrate further the difficulty presented by femininity and for women attempting to find a place within the possibilities offered to them. An ultra-feminine ‘look’ may have fulfilled the fantasies and desires of Dior and may have been a way of presenting a new, post-war woman but the disjunction between the fantasy of ‘The New Look’ and the realities of post-war austerity, meant that for most ordinary, working-class women it was an impossibility. Moreover, for many it was seen to be a retrospective step for women in that it failed to fit in with women's changed lifestyles and the practicalities of a life spent queuing and trying to make ends meet:

“...even if the many thousands of yards of material were available, and every woman had enough coupons for an entire wardrobe...can anyone seriously contemplate hopping on to a bus in a hobble skirt? Try lifting a bale of tweed - and imagine voluntarily adding to the fatigue of standing in the fish queue by having twenty yards of it hanging from one's waist. Think of doing housework, or sitting at a typewriter all day, or working in a factory, tightly corseted, and encumbered and constricted with layers of hip-padding and petticoats. Our mothers freed us from these in their

struggle for emancipation. And in our own active life there can be no possible place for them.

...Designing these sensational new fashions, it would seem that the couturiers have forgotten that they need the ordinary Parisian woman to show the world how to wear them. But, like ourselves, the ordinary Parisian woman has neither the leisure nor the money for clothes such as these."

(*Picture Post*, September 27, 1947)

In this section I have introduced a discussion of the ways that women were addressed by and situated within Austerity. This explanation of Austerity through looking at its presentation of femininity is set against and in relation to the more general contextualisation presented earlier. The foregrounding of gender in this way establishes first, the centrality of women and notions of femininity to the discursive formation of Austerity; secondly, the class specificities of this; thirdly, the ways that it is possible to see the appeals to women as a way of talking about class in post-war Britain. We can see how 'Austerity woman' was imbued with an old-fashionedness that represents the dominant culture's refusal of change, a harking back to a 'traditional Britishness', but this became more difficult to sustain as the period progressed as we shall see in relation to Affluence where debates around class and 'classlessness' are intensified. It is my argument that gender is a central facet of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation, that the presentation of femininity is crucial to the maintenance of ideas about the nature of Britishness, and that by looking at the interplay between the real, the ideological and the discursive we can see the construction of particular femininities. I would argue further, that whilst we can see here the establishment of a range of limited presentations of femininity, as the period moves unevenly from Austerity to

Affluence, the possibilities for women become more difficult to inhabit and if we proceed to consider the nature of Affluence in relation to shifting social and economic conditions then the construction of post-war femininity becomes more accutely defined.

### Affluence



"I say, isn't it wonderful to think there'll be no more chances for Mummy to go round looking martyred, telling people: 'Of course *we* always give *our* ration to the children'!" 5.ii.53

Illustration 4

"BOOM for brokers, decorators, dress designers. BOOM in cars, champagne, art treasures BOOM in lavish living..."(Headlines from BOOM issue of *Queen*, 15 September, 1959.)

'It is often said that there are no working-classes in England now, that a "bloodless revolution" has taken place, which has so reduced social differences that already most of us inhabit an almost flat plain, the plain of the lower middle- to middle-classes.' (Hoggart, 1957 (1966): 13)



"Oh, to hell with Nancy Mitford!  
What I always say is—if it's *me* it's U!"  
I.v.56

Illustration 5

"...I did not consider that the fifties were particularly affluent, although I suppose that the abolition of rationing and clothing coupons gave rise to rasher spending, and there certainly was a demand for consumer goods."  
(K. Dow)

"The fifties were in no way affluent as far as we were concerned, we were still struggling after the war, well into the fifties - with a few things still rationed...I thought it would have been the sixties before anyone (of our sort anyway), reached any kind of affluence at all." (A. Green)



"You see, darling, the real trouble is that nowadays even people who haven't got the means live beyond them!"  
3.ix.55

Illustration 6

If Austerity is the term that most usefully characterises the earlier part of the 1945-58 period then Affluence is equally productive for thinking about the latter part. In 1959, after the third Conservative General Election victory in a row, Harold Macmillan declared: "The class war is over and we have won it" (Gamble, 1974: 66).

'Other elements were seen to be replacing [class] as the basis of social stratification: status, a multiply differentiated "pecking order" based on a complex of education, employment and consumption achievements; education, the new universally available and meritocratic route by which status, through job success, could be achieved; consumption, the new "affluence" route through which status, on the "never-never", could be brought by those failing the meritocratic education hurdle...' (Clarke, Hall et al, 1983 (1976): 21-2)

The purpose of this section is to show how, by the end of the period, the notion of Affluence - both real (material conditions) and ideological (imaginary relations to aspects of real conditions) - had displaced Austerity.

There were, undeniably, real improvements in living standards during the post-war period in general; and the confidence apparent in Macmillan's 1957 claim that "most of our people have never had it so good. Go round the country, go to the

industrial towns, and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime”<sup>6</sup> was to some extent well founded.

“From 1951 to 1964 there was uninterrupted full employment, while productivity increased faster than in any period of comparable length in the twentieth century...As a result of this growth, the nation was better housed, better educated and better cared for in old age...Newly acquired affluence was symbolised by a profusion of cars, television and other consumer durable goods. In 1951 there were only 2.25 million cars in Britain and 1 million television sets. By 1964 there were over 8 million cars and 13 million TV sets...Average earnings had grown by 110 per cent, a rise of over 30 per cent in the average standard of living even allowing for inflated costs.” (Pinto-Duschinsky, 1970: 55-6)

The Conservatives held power throughout this period, having won the 1951 and 1955 elections (and going on to win the 1959 election), moreover, they were managing Welfare Capitalism rather than dismantling it: a development viewed with discomfort by conservative members of the cultural ‘establishment’:

“Evelyn Waugh was able to lament that, after the vicissitudes of Socialism, when Britain had seemed to him like a country under enemy occupation, the Conservatives had not put the clock back by one minute.” (Bogdanor, 1970: 80)

As Gamble has argued, the 1945 election defeat had led to a substantial reorganisation of the Conservative Party, the Right Progressive wing of the party had gained dominance, subsequently

“Conservative domestic policy was based on two main assumptions after they returned to power in 1951; the state sector was to be administered, not dismantled, and the unions were to be appeased. The acceptance of such

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<sup>6</sup>20 July 1957, cited in T.F. Lindsay & Michael Harrington, 1974: 202. Lindsay and Harrington remark that: “The barely concealed hostility to mass affluence which was felt and expressed by large sectors of the British political and cultural establishment in the later 1950s provides the student of national psychology with a fascinating theme for investigation.” (203)

priorities for the politics of power imposed powerful constraints on their policies, regardless of their ideological commitments.” (Gamble, 1974: 62-3, see p. 40 for the reorganisation of the party following the 1945 election)

The success of Conservative rule, coupled with social and economic changes, undermined Labour’s traditional base of support. Labour’s response was to move away from explicit socialist rhetoric towards ‘revisionism’, most influentially argued in Crosland’s *The Future of Socialism* (1956) on which Bogdanor has commented:

‘In fact, Britain no longer corresponded to a “classically capitalist society”; the achievement of the Labour Governments had been to show that the worst evils of the unregulated market economy could be removed without a total transformation of society. Certainly Britain in the 1950s, though not socialist, was very different from the society which the early Socialists had criticised...Crosland was implying that Socialism might be achieved without large-scale nationalisation. For if some of the objectives had been achieved within the mixed economy, why should not others be achieved in this way also? Thus public ownership was not a necessary means to the end of Socialism; the mixed economy could be accepted as final.’ (Bogdanor, 1970: 88-9)

Revisionism also meant that at the 1959 party conference Gaitskill led an attempt to remove Clause 4 from the party constitution. In other words, Labour revisionism was grounded within the frame of reference of the mixed capitalist economy, and by the mid-1950s, the term ‘Butskellism’ (coined by the *Economist* - Sked & Cook, 1986 (1979): 108) was current, used precisely to describe this apparent political consensus. Whilst Labour revisionism and Conservative progressiveness were by no means identical, the differences in approach and policy between the two parties appeared to be almost disappearing. As Gamble has suggested, in the run-up to the 1951 General Election,

“In their ideological offensive, the Conservatives had to mark out the dividing line between themselves and the Socialists without rejecting those parts of the postwar settlement that were endorsed by the New Conservatism.”

“It became plausible to suppose that the consensus between the parties on the state reflected a consensus in the nation.” (Gamble, 1974: 54 & 67)

This consensus had been established during the 1945-51 Labour Government; social reform and re-construction, democratisation and the egalitarian thrust of social security and the National Health Service, had meant that

‘a distinctive *ideology* of welfare-capitalism was propagated, and it constituted an unprecedentedly ambitious project of state legitimation...The rights to be guaranteed by the state entered the rhetoric of politicians across the spectrum; they underwrote the consensual ideology within which party politics was conducted. Harold Macmillan wrote in 1948 of the Conservatives' proposed “Workers’ Charter”: “Security of employment and security of contract; extra reward for extra effort; every position, from the bench to the Board Room, open to every worker; full knowledge of all that concerns the business or industry; profit-sharing and co-partnership wherever possible”.’ (Sinfield, 1989: 16, emphasis in the original.)

In one sense it could be argued that the period of Conservative government from 1951 onwards was simply a continuation of the social revolution begun by Labour in 1945. There were, however, crucial differences in play; these are contained in the way that Affluence was linked to ideas of classlessness and the belief that increased prosperity would remove class tensions and differences. For while Affluence elevated the working-classes in material terms, this prosperity was expected to be accompanied by a similar ‘adoption’ of middle-class values.

Two aspects of Affluence are relevant here; the question of economic growth on which it was based, and the supposed link between prosperity and upward class mobility. Although British economic growth appeared impressive in isolation, the



rate of growth was behind that of France, Germany, Japan or Italy (see Pinto-Duschinsky, op. cit.: 57). British economic policy had lacked any foundation in policies of re-structuring or long term investment and the failure to tackle successfully the underlying economic problems faced by Britain in the 1950s were concealed by Conservative policies of 'Bread and Circuses':

'This is not intended as a criticism of the pursuit by Conservatives of the ideals of prosperity and individual freedom. For what else should Governments exist but to provide the well-being of the people they serve? By "bread and circuses" is meant the sacrifice of policies desirable for the long term well-being of a country in favour of over-lenient measures and temporary palliatives bringing in immediate political return.' (Pinto-Duschinsky, op. cit.: 59)

Secondly, the extent of the new 'classlessness' that was seen to characterise British society at this time did not necessarily extend *across* class boundaries. Whilst there had been a general rise in living standards due to increased wages and higher levels of disposable income it was not the case also that economic affluence equated with the embourgeoisification of the working-class. As Westergaard and Resler have argued, increases in incomes did not automatically lead to a narrowing of the gap between the richest and poorest in society, and the distribution of wealth across the period was maintained in favour of the wealthiest (see Westergaard & Resler, 1977: 34 & 43).

If we consider responses from the questionnaires we can see how the experience of Affluence clashes with expectations of classlessness. The following extracts, contrasted with those of K. Dow and A. Green cited above (72), tell a mixed story of the 'affluent fifties', a story that both reveals the gaps between the 'ideology of

affluence' and experiences of the same period, but that also demonstrates on another level the opening up of new possibilities for a life less arduous than any that was possible in Austerity. Nevertheless, such testimonies problematise 'common sense' notions of classlessness and support arguments that old, rigid class hierarchies were not deeply troubled by Affluence and the expected upward class mobility.

"...I suppose in the 40s most of the films were escapism. Then...as the austerity period passed, one realised with hard work there was a possibility of a nicer way of life and one's expectations increased..." (A. Frodsham)

'...I think the war made women realise they could cope on their own...I think it gave women the confidence to tackle jobs which had been regarded as "men's jobs", and also to think about what sort of life they wanted after the war. I feel that I was lucky to have such a happy childhood, and having the cinema to go to and the "Never Had it So Good" Fifties - it was true - working men having cars and owning homes, and going abroad for holidays...We had the best, believe me.' (S. Darby)

It is clear that the spread of wealth was not uniformly experienced by all, but it is useful to note from the questionnaire extracts that something approaching a changed set of expectations and possibilities had replaced the overwhelming miasma of despondency that characterised Austerity. Nevertheless, the question of the classless society is more complicated than even the contradictory nature of these statements can account for and this is related to both the democratising thrust of post-war reconstructive policies and the ever-present 'threat' of Americanisation, discussed below. Class formalities may have become more insignificant as the 40s progressed into the 50s, and it may be the case, as Clarke et al argue above, that 'education, employment and consumption-achievements' had

replaced class as the basis of social stratification in 1950s Britain, but these were nevertheless negotiated through notions of 'value' and 'taste' that were determined by the dominant culture. For instance, the publication of Nancy Mitford's 'U' and 'non-U' article in *Encounter*, September 1955, may have been seen by some as an indication of terminal decline in the established (pre-war) class system (see, for example, Booker, 1970 (1969): 102; Hopkins, 1964: 354-5), but the reverberations caused by the article suggest that what it provoked and represented was not so much a disruption of existing class hierarchies but a redefinition of class based on a 'new' value system. If the new meritocracy meant that individuals could no longer easily be 'placed' through educational background and occupation, then patterns of 'correct' speech and behaviour replaced the traditional, economically based system of class differentiation. Similarly, whilst on the one hand Richard Hoggart valorised 'authentic' working-class culture and the 'earnest minority' who "seek culture and intellectual background" (1966 (1957): 322), he at the same time despaired of the "possible interplay between material improvement and cultural loss" (ibid.: 343. See also, Sinfield, 1989: 232-50 on 'left-culturalism'). Hoggart's use of terms is interesting here and illustrates precisely the conceptual and intellectual framework that influenced contemporary debates around issues of class and anxieties about the apparent breakdown of the values of humanism embodied in the early post-war years:

'...I felt I could reasonably take for granted a general agreement on certain assumptions, an agreement sufficient to allow me to use, without closer definition than emerges from the detailed illustrations, words such as "decent", "healthy", "serious", "valuable", "poor", "weakening", "hollow"

and “trivial”.’ (1966 (1957): 344)

One of the most useful ways of conceptualising this notion of the redefinition of values and notions of taste is through reference to Bourdieu’s concept of ‘cultural capital’. Here, the ascription of social difference is determined by cultural competence - the recognition and consumption of appropriate forms and signs of culture - rather than simply by economic status (although not completely independent of economic capital) (see Bourdieu, 1986: 11-95). Cultural competence may be either ‘learned’ (achieved through education) or ‘inherited’ (‘natural’ or ‘intuitive’) and is thus more clearly understood through reference to notions of value and taste than through reference to questions of income or wealth. This, of course, involves also the issue of ‘whose taste and values?’ and, as Ross has pointed out,

‘...if Bourdieu’s observation is extended far enough, then we would have to recognize that the exercise of taste not only *presupposes* distinctive social categories; it also helps to *create* them, in the shape of apparently “natural” cultural classes.’ (Ross, 1989: 59, emphasis in the original)

A 1949 *Picture Post* feature is interesting to consider in relation to this framework. Although it pre-dates what might be considered the period of Affluence proper, the feature, entitled *Are the Middle Class Doomed?* locates the particularities of middle-classness in a way of life, a set of standards, rather than income:

“...For all its past glories and power, the middle-class cannot really be defined. The criterion is partly accent, partly behaviour, partly habits, and not always income. And today the standards of one class merge into those of another. The working-class mix with the lower middle-class, and some people from what used to be the ‘best’ families are settling down to the same pattern of living as the suburban housewife.” (*Picture Post*, 4 June, 1949)

The lessening of the economic gap between classes was believed to be making middle-class life more difficult to maintain since it was rooted in and marked by a range of cultural pursuits rather than simply by patterns of spending or levels of income. Thus, the 'threat' to middle-class life and standards was located in a set of values, a way of living and this is supported in the article by the publication of a selection of 'middle-class household budgets'.

"...The non-manual class is a minority, but a minority that covers a very wide range of incomes, occupations and interests... You will see that there is money for food, for rent, for heating, for some Utility clothes and for a few amusements, for these people are far from the poverty line. But in many cases the frills have been discarded. The old struggle for competitive gentility has ended; now comes the struggle to hold on to the essentials of middle-class living..." (ibid.)

The struggle, as *Picture Post* sees it, is not then a struggle to make ends meet but a struggle to maintain a middle-class culture, a particular way of life that is understandable with reference to the notion of cultural capital. As this extract above indicates, it is the forced sacrifice of 'frills' - books, amusements, what the author calls 'the little more than living' extras - that makes the middle-classes' existence so tenuous and endangered.

"For these people life is duller. There is little left for buying the extras that make all the difference - the new book instead of waiting for the dog-eared edition from the public library; the new hat, instead of austerity scarves; new look skirts, instead of let-down hems. The men hang on to pre-war suits, and cut down on smokes and drinks... *Many cultural pleasures have been lost*. There is less social meeting and less travel. Many young married people are living largely on inherited mental capital, benefitting from the home background of a more leisured, wealthier class. The children of many middle-class people today have *a less cultured background*; they have mothers who know no leisure, fathers with little money for hobbies and amusements. Today the middle-class, as our parents knew it, is indeed

disappearing. A new standard of living is taking shape.” (ibid., my emphasis)

It is here, in the evocation of ‘middle-class culture’ that we can see the usefulness of a framework that shifts an understanding of class from the economic to the cultural realm, for it is precisely through references to the loss of cultural capital that the article explains the changes to middle-classness. Moreover, the ‘handing down’ of cultural capital, ‘inherited mental capital’, suggests the naturalisation of class differences, the creation of a ‘natural’ cultural elite. The implication is that the real problem is the loss of this ‘naturally cultured class’, the loss of a set of identifiable, understandable and inherited cultural knowledges and competences. Of course, this is rooted in decreasing economic wealth, or more accurately the failure of middle-class incomes either to keep pace with the cost of living, or maintain the earnings gap between middle- and working-class, but the ramifications of economic shifts are explained through reference to the effects of this on a traditional middle-classness.

This feature is interesting in another respect also, in the way that it recounts changes to the lives of middle-class women. The shifting landscape of tastes and values is clarified here through the foregrounding of the changed position of the ‘middle-class wife’. The article begins thus:

‘Before the war, the middle-class wife shopped by phone, and had most things delivered at the door. The doctor called in his car and was probably shown in by the maid. The children went to the nearby private school. There were occasional sherry and bridge parties. There was time - and energy - for some voluntary social work. And the housewife from the council flats might “help” with the spring-cleaning.

Today the middle-class wife and the council flat wife queue side by side for the fish. Later, they may meet at the doctor's surgery. They may wait together outside the primary school playground. Both wear Utility coats, and carry heavy shopping bags. And their hands tell the same story of potatoes peeled and floors scrubbed.

In ten years, what a change! It shows so great a merging of standards that economists talk of a social revolution and prophesy the end of the middle-class.' (ibid.)

It is the role of the middle-class wife that is most affected; her role in the home, her relationship to her children, her leisure activities.

'Salaries cannot keep up with prices, and there are few savings to fall back on. Now the wife knows that she must do all the housework and look after the children. Yet middle-class standards are somehow kept up. Meals are eaten in the dining-room, though it would be less work to eat in the kitchen. The children still go out for a walk in the afternoon, but the mother is now the nursemaid, and often has to finish the housework when the children are in bed. Mothers, remembering their own quiet night nurseries, believe that young children should go to bed early, and so, as the budget won't stretch to "baby-minders," parents rarely go out together...Homes are shabbier...Among the newly married, only the lucky couples with furniture to inherit have got properly furnished homes. Mostly, furniture and equipment is a mixture of Utility and odds and ends - cups don't match saucers, there is no spare armchair, and not enough blankets for a spare bed.' (ibid.)

There are parallels here with Mrs. Jones and the presentation of Austerity in relation to a dogged struggle to maintain minimum standards; the minimum standards may be different - books instead of the radio soaps - but there is a continuity here which is important. In both instances, the struggling but respectable housewife - working- or middle-class - is *responsible*, doing what she can to maintain a familiar way of life. For Mrs. Jones the struggle was always the same - to have enough resources - for the middle-class wife the task is to marshall limited resources, to adapt domestic life within a different (less opulent) range of standards

and more limited possibilities. Whilst it may be argued that the full effects of the 'affluent society' do not begin to make a difference until a few years after 1949 (and we have seen from the questionnaire extracts that, for some, it was considerably later before improved standards of living were experienced), I would argue that this feature, published at the end of the 40s, is useful in that it shows some continuities in the presentation of 'appropriate femininity' across the transitional period from Austerity to Affluence. These can be identified in terms of the ways that the woman in the home is presented as central to the maintenance of particular ways of life; it is she who manages the household, who is responsible for the well-being of the family, and who thus becomes a signifier of the particular values and standards associated with the class of which she is a part. In a sense she becomes the mediator between the economic realities of the time and a sense of identity that is rooted in ideas of nationhood and reflected in dominant ideologies. If it is accepted that the ideal of classlessness is one of the mainstays of Affluence, then we can see how the middle-class housewife and her changed lifestyle are the result of the 'social revolution' that was initiated with the 1945 Labour Government and continued into the 1950s. The issue then shifts from that of the embourgeoisification of the working-classes to what Elizabeth Wilson has suggested may be the more appropriate idea of the 'proletarianisation of the middle-class wife' and the 'equalising effects of drudgery' (see Wilson, 1980:13), for it is housework, domesticity (drudgery) that constitutes perhaps more than anything else the presentation of women as classless (another aspect of this was



Welfarism which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3).

The shifting class relations of post-war Britain were a source of concern to the 'traditionally' dominant classes, and the role and activities of women were frequently raised as ways of articulating such concerns. The presentation of women as central to the running of the domestic economy and thus as central to the maintenance of ideals of family life as the centre of society, exerted pressures on women who could not fulfill the domestic ideal, whether due to economic necessity or choice. But more than this, women's domestic role was privileged in discursive constructions of femininity that operated somewhere in the spaces between ideology and reality - between the economic realities of austerity Britain and the re-negotiation of national identity through Austerity; between the shifting economy from Austerity to Affluence and the need to sustain class differences in the face of a loss of values and standards; between the mixed economic prosperity of Affluence and the newly developed consumer culture of 50s Britain. The result of this was that women were constantly struggling between the demands of real life and the demands of the dominant ideology; the siting of women in the home, and the presentation of women as responsible for adapting to economic and social change, meant that women, and the specific femininities that attached to women, were placed in quite particular relations of consumption. Whilst this may have been related to resourcefulness in Austerity and in Affluence to responsible management, in both instances it is the prudent and thrifty woman that is held up as a model for modern femininity. This was to have particular consequences for

representations of femininity in the formation of Affluence, presentations that sharpened notions of 'correct' or 'appropriate' forms of womanliness, focused these around patterns of consumption, and 'created' the opposition between appropriate and inappropriate femininities.

Elizabeth Wilson has argued that the position of women in the 'classless society' provided

"the touchstone for the social revolution, their situation [was] *the* paradigm of Britain's successful experiment in non-revolutionary democracy and gradualist approach to equality - of class as well as sex... Somehow the installation of hoovers, refrigerators, electric mixers, and washing machines was held to have given housewives *equality*. Quite apart from the fact that only a minority of women had access to these aids, while many still laboured at home without even hot water, there was an awful complacency about this myth... In any case, even where electricity did replace muscle power, most of the burdens and responsibilities of domesticity remained untouched. But this was just one example of how myths and stereotypes proliferated so that the woman wielding the Hoover could become the symbol of the social revolution that had obliterated inequality; for women were above all *classless*." (Wilson, 1980: 12, emphasis in the original)

The most notable shift that we can see if we look at femininity across Austerity and Affluence is the way that the notion of woman as citizen (called upon to sacrifice the 'comforts' of domesticity for entry into the labour market) all but disappears. In the 1949 *Picture Post* article discussed above, the middle-class wife is firmly situated in the private sphere, her contact with the public world of work followed either the traditional pattern of voluntary work or was a part-time activity, undertaken to bolster her husband's salary and perhaps provide a few 'frills'. The question of women's employment is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 3, here it is important to establish the change in representations of women's engagement

with and involvement in the public sphere.

Janice Winship has written of this in relation to the ways that women's magazines presented roles and possibilities for women. Whereas she suggests a concern with nation and the call for women to be 'good citizens' in the immediate post-war years,

'In the pages of magazines after 1953 the nation was left to look after itself. For women the burning concern and proud burden to bear became how best to make marriage, family and home all that had been hoped for during those long years of disruption and deprivation. And perhaps their most vivid dream was of what to buy. It was consumption which was to provide the impetus for a new form of an old ideology of femininity...before feminism broke again consumption and women's "new" post-war role were also to provide bountiful scope for an unprecedented expansion of the magazine market - and of its profits.' (Winship, 1987: 35-6)

Although we can see that women's role as consumers - their prudent management of the household budget - was an important aspect of Austerity too, it is in the light of Affluence that women become situated in relations of consumption that define femininity in particular ways, and patterns and *types* of consumption become ways of signifying appropriate femininities that are also class specific. This is crucial to an understanding of the construction of femininity in 40s and 50s Britain and its representation in films of the period.

The alignment of women with consumerism has a long history and in her book on nineteenth century consumer culture, Rachael Bowlby (with reference to Baudrillard) provides a useful definition of the 'consumer citizen':

'The consumer is not (just) an active appropriator of objects for sale. His or her entire identity, the constitution of the self as a social subject, as a

“citizen of consumer society,” depends on the acquisition of appropriate objects...There is thus a clear sense in which the consumer citizen is not so much possessor of as possessed by the commodities which one must have to make oneself in the form objectively guaranteed as that of a social individual. What is by definition one’s own, one’s very identity or individuality, is at the same time something which has to be put on, acted or worn as an external appendage...’ (Bowlby, 1985: 28)

This idea of a performative aspect of the consumer citizen is interesting and I will come back to it in discussion of the films, but it is also relevant to thinking about the particular form of consumerism that was attached to femininity in Britain in the 50s. In the context of Britain’s boom in privatised consumption which characterised one aspect of the ‘affluent society’ and targeted the home as a site of consumption, this newly articulated alignment of women with consumerism, woman as ‘consumer citizen’, had a particular inflection, for “economically and ideologically, women were the clue, the door to the selective penetration of the family and privatised consumption by the new capitalism.” (Hall, 1980b: 23)

Yet the problem for Affluence was that this was difficult to maintain against the realities of the time, in which women were not simply privatised consumers but, increasingly, workers also (see Chapter 3). It was the difficulty of reconciling these two roles - woman as mother/wife/consumer and woman as (part-time) worker which, Hall suggests, led to ‘the proliferation of ideological discourses around “women’s roles” in the period, and the struggle to privilege certain of their interpellative structures against others.’ (ibid.) Within this ‘proliferation of discourses’ women were both agents and focal points of consumerism; Affluence was, in a sense, aimed at female consumption and particularly at the housewife.

Government policy from 1951 onwards turned production from export to home consumption, house building increased, as did home ownership, and the years of austere living had, in any case, created a climate in which people were hungry for consumer goods. The rapid influx of consumer goods onto the home market meant that there was more choice than ever before, and people did have more money to spend. Yet for women the task of 'living up to' ideals of femininity didn't necessarily get any easier than the housework, despite hoovers and refrigerators, the increased availability of goods, or higher levels of disposable income.

'Even as commodities physically lightened much housework for women the tasks of their domestic role were both transformed *and* increased. Occupation Housewife was regarded nevertheless as indisputably upgraded. The influential market researcher Mark Abrams described it succinctly: "Since now home has become the centre of his activity and most of his earnings are spent on or in the home his wife becomes the *chooser* and *spender* and gains a *new status* and *control* - her tastes form his life.'" (Winship, 1987: 43, emphasis in original)

Winship argues that the women's magazines of the 1950s were influential in the process of educating women about the 'new consumer work' that was expected of them (60-1). Importantly, this education centred around achieving the correct expression of femininity, appropriate to fashionable ideas of good taste that reflected middle-class tastes. Therefore, if properly executed, the housewife could 'change' the appearance of her home and herself and in doing so could *appear* middle-class (or at least to have *adopted* middle-class tastes and values). The increased range of goods on the market also meant an increased range of choice and, faced with this, another aspect of the women's magazines was to promote the

‘correct’ choices - choices that would reflect an individuality, a difference. With reference to the ‘consumer citizen’ it is possible to see how femininity in Affluence (dependent upon a new form of consumption and ideological representation) could be organised around consumption practices and patterns that showed women to be *appropriately* womanly, so that femininity (as an identity, a set of roles and behaviours) is, precisely, something that has to be acted out, presented. Two examples from the questionnaires focus on this acting-out of femininity by recollecting how the ‘goal’ for women was to display these signs of femininity:

“I suppose during the 50s glamour was everything and women were expected to have a perfect 36b figure and platinum hair...in those days there wasn’t an alternative, that was the stereotype and you all tried to copy it, all the film magazines at that time publicised that image, you never saw Celia Johnson in that kind of magazine.” (J. Gien)

‘...clothes for the more fashion conscious and hair styles seemed to play an important part of the 50s...woman, but it meant more than it does today. Jewellery also meant something - and was endlessly “drooled over” if somebody turned up with some new item - especially an engagement ring.’ (J. Keen)

It is in its presentation as an outward display of individual identity that femininity reflects and performs Affluence; the display of jewellery, of fashion, of the body was codified such that femininity assumes a particular form. Yet it is in the possibilities for expressing femininities that we hit a problem for women in Affluence. On the one hand women were presented with a wider range of possible choices (of consumer durables, fashions, goods) yet on the other, the actual choices available accorded to a rigidly defined hierarchy of tastes in which there was, in the end, little room for manoeuvre.

'In "Traditional furniture in colourful settings" Edith Blair...guides on how to "choose wisely" to make "the most interesting home". The codes of taste - the carefully placed cyclamen, bowl of fruit, and arrangement of plates on the dresser - have the ring of middle-class styles.

In "Accent on your waist" Veronica Scott implies that the clever feminine woman needs to know her fabrics and the latest fashion look: "Waists are in full focus again, for the most feminine line of all." The look she is to strive for has pretensions to class - "all round elegance", the notion of "a dress for every occasion", the snooty air of the models. And a pretension of choice offers the possibility of individual expression - "Choose from this selection the clothes you need for work and play, to suit your individual background and way of life." But the choice is within a tight conformity; literally, "the belted look".' (Winship, 1987: 60)

Affluent femininity was premised upon display and presentation, but only within a limited range of choices that conformed to dominant (and recalcitrant) notions of good taste, of the possession of cultural capital. We shall see in discussion of *Turn the Key Softly* for instance, that the ascription of appropriate femininity is determined by the adoption of certain, acceptable modes of consumption and display; these are organised around the class positions of the characters in the film and are represented through dress and appearance. The first of the questionnaire extracts cited on the previous page (J. Gein) is interesting in this respect since the writer makes direct comparison between the femininity of 1940s woman (discrete and refined) and her 1950s counterpart (gaudy and artificial).<sup>7</sup> Where glamour may have been an aspiration it is also the case that glamorousness by the late 50s came to be seen as a sign of inappropriate femininity; a style and mode of behaviour

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<sup>7</sup>See Aspinall, in Curran and Porter (eds) 1983: 272-93, for an account of the shift in images of women in British films at this time from "the dignified woman of the 1940s, with her tailored suit and well modulated upper-class accent, and the pouting young blonde of the 1950s, with her noticeable breasts and lack of concern for class formalities." (273)

premised upon a particular, unacceptable, type of consumption - flashy, excessive, 'cheap' - that was linked to both the influence of American culture and the excesses of consumerism - accompanied by a concurrent loss of traditional Britishness. This femininity was equated with artificiality or pretence - precisely the characteristics identified by Hoggart as 'responsible' for the decline of an authentic working-class culture - and was aligned with notions of an irresponsible working-class, lured by the glitter and brightness of consumer culture, seduced by the spectacle of American lifestyles as they appeared in popular culture from magazines to films and the new independent television channels.

Yet there is a fundamental contradiction here that goes to the heart of Affluence, and that operates in tandem with the particular expression of Americanisation at this time. For, as consumer citizen, defined and identified through the possession and display of the products of a newly consumerised, capitalist culture, glamorous femininity perhaps achieved the most successful expression of the culture from which it was produced. However, this femininity broke all the rules of good taste that kept a check on the worst excesses of an 'un-educated and indiscriminate' working-class consumer. This will be discussed in detail in relation to the film *Yield to the Night* in which glamorous femininity is scrutinised, judged and found wholly inappropriate, but it is important here because it exemplifies precisely the limits of real possibilities for femininity in Affluence, and because it is so integral a part of the interplay between Affluence and Americanisation, and the tensions created by this interplay. It is at the limit points of Affluence that it is possible to



locate and identify the weaknesses in constructions of femininity, yet it is also here that the success of Affluence as an ideological structure can be seen.

Where Affluence was grounded in real improvements in people's lives (full employment, higher levels of disposable income, increased availability of goods), the deeply rooted economic problems that led to subsequent difficulties such as the 1961 balance of payments crisis, were concealed by the presentation of Britain as a society that had re-entered the world of commerce and re-established itself as major force in the world, both politically and economically. At the same time, the real gaps between classes and incomes remained. The concern with the relationship between class, consumption and taste can be understood as an aspect of attempts to re-draw class boundaries (rather than disrupt them) in the light of shifts in income and occupational structures.

Another way of understanding this is in relation to the struggle between dominant and emergent ideologies.<sup>8</sup> The emergence of a full-blown ideology of consumerism (largely driven by increased working-class spending power and the expansion of markets that this both permitted and sustained) represented a disruption of old hierarchies. The form in which anxieties about this was expressed circulated around notions of taste and values that were rooted in middle-classness and attempts to maintain a sort of old-fashioned ideal of working-class life and culture. I would argue that these found their most powerful expression through the

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<sup>8</sup>See Raymond Williams, "Dominant, Residual and Emergent" in Williams, 1977: 121-7.

presentation of appropriate and inappropriate femininities - an over-determination of womanliness that was at the same time an act of displacement; the displacement of anxieties about the working-classes onto the bodies of women. Herein lies the continuity across Austerity and Affluence; the way that these were expressed may be quite different across the two but the function they served was the same - the prescription of limited femininities, dependent on types and patterns of consumption and grounded in rigid class hierarchies that may have been disrupted but were never seriously threatened. Thus, *Picture Post* can express this in relation to the changing world of the middle-class family and the loss of particular cultural competences, and a commentator such as Hoggart can talk of the loss of an authentic, serious and earnest working-class culture. In both cases these fears are displaced onto presentations of femininity, so that Mrs. Jones and the 'middle-class housewife', along with Celia Johnson, are held up as models for a femininity in Austerity that is responsible and prudent, whilst the figure of the glamorous 50s woman, most notably represented through Joan Collins or Diana Dors, is vilified as a repository for everything that is hollow, trivial and superficial. (Of course, this was not necessarily the interpretation given to such figures by women at the time and the disparities between critics' and audiences' reception of Dors in particular is one of the points of disruption for Affluence: this is discussed in Chapter 6.)

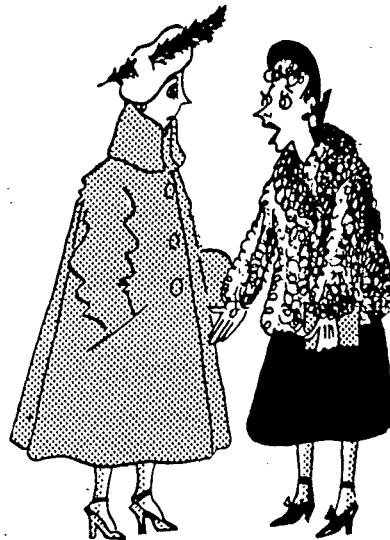
In the latter part of the period, anxieties about the national culture were also expressed in relation to perceived corruption by external influences - primarily the influx of American culture - and the relationship between Affluence and Austerity

and Americanisation is important to establish. The issue of Americanisation involves questions of economic, ideological and cultural imperialism, but it also pertains to particular forms of consumption and behaviour. The outline of Americanisation contained in the next section attends to each of these, but it is not intended that Americanisation have equal status to Austerity and Affluence. Rather, the definition of Americanisation that I want to develop is one that provides for subsequent chapters a way of citing Americanisation as a 'shorthand' for talking about a specific type of consumption (of both cultural products and forms) that is attached to constructions of both class and femininity within Affluence and Austerity. In other words, Americanisation is primarily an aspect of Affluence (particularly) and Austerity, that refers to dominant notions of taste, value, authenticity and so on as they are represented as under threat from the acceptability of certain patterns of consumption over others.

### **Americanisation**

"...the majority of British intellectuals...have always been ready to lend an ear to any witness bringing from the United States new evidence of American vulgarity and inferiority." (Andre Visson, *As Others See Us*, Doubleday, New Jersey, 1948: 95, cited in Swann, 1987: 15)

'...the most striking feature in (British) working class attitudes to America is not a suspicion, though there is often that, nor a resentment at "bossiness", but a large readiness to accept. This arises mainly from the conviction that in most things the Americans can "show us a thing or two" about being up to date. In so far as being up to date is felt to be important, America is the leader; and to be up to date is being made to seem very important.' (Hoggart, op. cit.: 190)



"Darling, how does one entertain Americans? . . . If one gives them Spam and doesn't change, we're a down-at-heel, C<sub>3</sub> nation, dying of malnutrition, while if one blows the week's meat ration and wears a new frock one's shamelessly abusing Marshall aid!" 12.xi.48

Illustration 7.

'I think that America was considered by many Britons to be a "land of plenty". The portrayal of American life as shown by the then American film industry was that of luxury apartments, well-off families and large successful businesses...we compared their apparently high standards of living with our austere years of rationing, clothing coupons, and general shortages. For instance, the word "nylons" was magic to our ears - even as late as 1950.' (K. Dow.)

"Now if you mention the effect of the YANKS - that did have a great effect on all of the teenagers. They were stationed [nearby] and their smart uniforms, accents and manners were quite different to anything we had experienced. And NYLONS! I can still remember seeing my first pair of nylons...MAGIC!" (S. Darby)

These extracts attest to the varied and contradictory responses characterising attitudes towards America, Americans and Americanisation. The tension between these is expressed in a range of anxieties - standardisation, uniformity, vulgarity, coupled with an apparent resentment (or fear) of American Modernity, versus the envy, celebration and enjoyment of a society that appeared to offer equality of opportunity and access to patterns of consumption that simply did not exist in

post-war Britain.

In the introduction to his book on design in the forties and fifties Bevis Hillier has written:

‘Why “Austerity/Binge”? In England, the period begins with wartime austerity and continues with it up to and including the “You’ve never had it so good” of the late 1950s; but for the Americans (...) it was less a period of austerity...When I asked an American dealer friend what they called the period immediately after the war, he replied “We called it the Binge” - a fresh sounding yet period-slang word which also seemed to me to typify the English “regeneration” feeling of the 1951 junketings and beyond.’ (Hillier, 1975: 11)

This stark contrast in two different cultures’ perception and experience of the same period could easily be seen as foundation for resentment, even hostility; Americans had characterised themselves as the ‘saviours of Europe’ and were sending over ‘Bundles for Britain’. Moreover, whilst Britain’s industrial base (let alone economic and social stability) had been practically devastated by World War Two and Britons were destined to a further period of hardship, the Americans had not only been relatively untouched by the war, they had benefitted from the chaos in Europe to attain economic dominance. As Sked and Cook point out:

‘The country, having sacrificed its export trade and not yet being able to pay its way in the world, was absolutely dependent on American aid. Yet on 21 August 1945 President Truman abruptly cancelled lend-lease...since the “economic royalists”...within his administration could not see the wisdom of quickly restoring a worldwide trading equilibrium. Instead, they were much more concerned to consolidate the economic advantages which had accrued to America as a result of the war.’ (op. cit.: 27)

The loan agreement that replaced lend-lease was unfavourable in terms, in the amount of money secured (not quite two-thirds of what was needed) and tied the

British economy to a relationship of dependence that would last into the next century since repayments were to be spread over a fifty year period starting in 1951 (see Sked & Cook, *ibid.*: 27-8).

In June 1947, the U.S. Secretary of State outlined the 'Marshall Plan', proposing in a speech that America should "assist in the return of normal economic health in the world without which there can be no political stability or assured peace." (*ibid.*: 67) By 1948 the Plan had been discussed by European ministers and heads of Governments, agreed with the Americans and was operative. Marshall Aid was instrumental in the reconstruction of Europe's economic stability but it was not a simple expression of American philanthropy; the Marshall Plan was also further evidence of America's growing economic dominance and hence Britain's shrinking imperial power, and it was designed to protect Europe from Communism.<sup>9</sup>

Hopkins (*op. cit.*: 64-8) refers to a climate of uneasiness in Britain during the immediate post-war years that focused on the role and influence of American economic policy, and counterposed what was seen as an American hard-sell approach to post-war reconstruction with the heroic sacrifices and struggles of the U.S.S.R. The end of the lend-lease agreement and the terms of the new loan resulted in a Commons motion in 1946 that deplored the Labour Government's

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<sup>9</sup>As Sked and Cook point out, Marshall was careful to include Russia in the initial proposals: "The offer to include Russia was a skilful piece of diplomacy. An acceptance on the part of that power would almost certainly have sunk the scheme; however, the insistence on European cooperation made the prospect of Russian cooperation unlikely." (1986 (1979): 67)

“subservience” to the United States. American journals and newspapers printed scathing attacks on the British ‘social revolution’ that left little room for doubt about Britain’s apparent shortcomings in a post-war world that was powered by aggressive capitalism.<sup>10</sup> When the Marshall Plan was accepted by Europe, questions were raised about the motives behind it:

‘...if the United States aid was truly disinterested, why wasn’t it dispensed through the United Nations? Might not the Marshall Plan be just another case of “Dollar Imperialism”, of the same old dollar diplomacy which was now busy turning Germany into a capitalist free-for-all and which had attached to the U.S. Loan conditions disastrous for Britain but favourable to American policies? “America has swung Right when the rest of the world is going Left,” complained the authors of the pamphlet *Keep Left* in 1947.’

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<sup>10</sup>Examples of these were provided in *Picture Post*, September 6, 1947 when, in an article entitled *Britain’s Economic Crisis. THE AMERICAN VIEW*, a range of cartoons and editorials from American newspapers on Britain’s dire economic straits were printed. Whilst not especially ‘scathing’, these extracts demonstrate a tendency towards ‘superiority’ that would not have found favour with British readers in Austerity Britain.

For instance, the *Washington Post* reported with amazement on the apparent ignorance of the British people about the depths of the economic crisis:

“The explanation of the indifference of the majority of citizens to a tough set of economic facts of life is that they simply haven’t been informed of them...The leaders of the Labour Party haven’t in plain language told their followers, or the people of Britain at large, how serious is their trouble. It is trouble which at best admits of a most painful and drastic solution - tightening of a belt already drawn up close. Not until a recent Saturday did the British people hear the situation presented to them in the gravity it deserves. Winston Churchill laid it on the line in straight terms, none the less effective for being politically partisan.”

And in an incredulous and hostile report in *Picture Post*’s June 8, 1948 issue, Edward Hulton attacks the *Daily Mail* for printing the ‘amazing thoughts’ of the American commentator Walter Lippmann:

“Walter Lippmann is, perhaps, the most highly regarded of American commentators of foreign affairs; and he has hitherto also been thought of as one of the principal American friends of Britain. He has now come out in an astounding attack upon this country. This can be read in four articles which the *Daily Mail* has rendered a public service by publishing.”

(Hopkins, op. cit.: 68)

The economic climate of post-war Britain and the apparent social and political repercussions of the relationship between the two nations was shaped by ideological as well as economic concerns and was thus conducted within the framework Cold War politics. As Calvocoressi has argued, to the Americans the post-war difficulties being encountered by much of Europe

“... were seen as opportunities for communism. Western European Governments...would keel over and red revolution would triumph if the U.S.A. did not come to the rescue... The Marshall Plan and the North Atlantic Treaty were the centrepieces in a continental, economic and military strategy which linked the futures of democratic and capitalist Europe with the emerging conflict between American and Russian power and ideologies, a conflict which would be enlarged to global dimensions and would dominate international affairs for at least a generation and would lead in the fifties and beyond to a British dependence on the U.S.A. for costly weaponry, prolonging and emphasising Britain's dependence on the U.S.A. for a financial lifeline in the forties.” (Calvocoressi, op. cit.: 17)

Thus, Britain entered an extended period of financial dependence on America, and saw the United States consolidating its position as the most powerful and successful trading nation in the world, a position that Britain itself had once occupied. America's opposition to the abortive Suez expedition, and Britain's subsequent realisation of its loss of military, as well as economic, power can only have confirmed further Britain's relegation.

These anxieties about America and Americanisation extend back to the middle of the nineteenth century and focused, in the early twentieth century at least, on particular forms of mass industrial production and mass culture. Dick Hebdige's analysis of the discourse of Americanisation from 1930s to the 1950s is useful here



(see Hebdige, 1988: 45-76). He clarifies the links between social and economic change (new technological developments such as automation and new patterns and forms of consumption), and concerns around 'popular culture' and 'popular taste' (American products and Hollywood films) that were collectively expressed through recourse to the notion of Americanisation. In this way, Americanisation can be understood as a combination of economic, social and cultural developments that were seen to represent a threat to the national culture and character.

The relations between economic, political and ideological elements provide some background to the sources of what was perceived as the 'threat' of Americanisation, and these have only been indicated above. One ground on which anxieties about American domination were played out most forcefully was in the arena of cultural commentary and criticism. This focused on concerns about social change, ushered in by technological advances and economic shifts, and the ramifications of this for 'traditional' ways of life in relation to popular taste and popular culture. Within this nexus of different concerns, and encompassing commentators from a range of different political perspectives, a 'negative consensus' united cultural critics. This is Hebdige's term, used to characterise the shared language of three disparate cultural commentators - Hoggart, Orwell and Waugh - that was based around a set of 'negative' qualities; a consensus of 'taste' arrived at through the attribution of negative values.

'... a number of cultural critics and commentators working out of quite different traditions equated the expanded productive potential opened up by the automation of manufacturing processes with the erosion of fundamental

“British” or “European” values and attitudes and further associated this “levelling down” of moral and aesthetic standards with the arrival in Britain of consumer goods which were either imported from America or designed and manufactured “on American lines”.’ (Hebdige, 1988: 47)

These are concerns that reveal anxieties about shifts in the traditional class structure of post-war Britain. Significantly, they displace anxieties about class onto the terrain of Americanisation with particular emphasis placed on the notion of a ‘levelling down process’:

‘References to the pernicious influence of American popular culture began to appear whenever the “levelling down” process was discussed and the concept of “Americanisation” was swiftly and effortlessly absorbed into the existing vocabulary of the ‘Culture and Society’ debate...America was seen by many...writers as the prime mover in this terrifying process, as *the* homogenising agent and from the 1930s onwards the United States (and its productive processes and scale of consumption) began to serve as the image of industrial barbarism; a country with no past and therefore no real culture, a country ruled by competition, profit and the drive to acquire. It was soon used as a paradigm for the future threatening every advanced industrial democracy in the western world.’ (ibid.: 52-3, emphasis in original)

The question of American cultural domination had a wider circulation than the internal political and social concerns of Britain; in 1954 UNESCO held a conference on ‘transatlantic cultural relations’ that clearly and explicitly addressed the question of the effects of Americanisation on national cultures:

‘Americanisation involves a general raising of the standard of living, for which the man in the street certainly has no cause to complain. But it is inevitably accompanied by a certain social “levelling” which cannot be expected to be entirely satisfactory to the elite.’ (UNESCO, *The Old World and the New World: Their Cultural and Moral Relations*, UNESCO, New York, 1954, cited in Swann, op. cit.: 15.)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>It becomes noticable that the use of ‘Americanisation’ by commentators in the period refers, in the latter years, to the ways that Americanisation is seen to

Americanisation is presented here as a positive economic influence, yet the quotation also addresses the question of the links between raised standards of living (including higher disposable incomes) and the blurring of traditional social (and class) distinctions. 'Levelling' is related to changes in patterns of consumption, and this is a theme that recurs throughout debates around Affluence also. For instance, Hoggart's use of particular language as outlined above clearly refers to the oppositions he draws between 'traditional forms' of working-class culture and 'new' forms of mass consumer culture. Yet the issue is more complicated: on one hand, the adoption by the working-classes of apparently middle-class patterns of consumption was, it was hoped, to be accompanied by a corresponding adoption of middle-class 'values'. Whilst at the same time, at least according to conservative cultural commentators such as Evelyn Waugh, the existence of difference - primarily class difference - enabled the signification of 'value'; Affluence masked or clouded difference and hence made the ascription of 'value' impossible.

"Waugh merely stood in the vanguard of a widespread backlash against the confident post-war rhetoric of reconstruction and equal opportunity - a backlash which spread across the entire field of cultural criticism during the 1950s." (Hebdige, op. cit.: 50)

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influence and/or undermine 'Culture', whilst in the earlier part of the period commentary primarily focused on the economic effects of Americanisation. I would refer back to pp. 36-7 where I outlined that a characteristic of Americanisation is its different inflections across the period, and stress that in my use of the term, it is intended that both cultural and economic aspects are kept in play - as we shall see in later Chapters, notions of Americanisation were inscribed onto representations of femininity through the period.

It is in this sense that attention to the nuances of class formations as exemplified by 'U' and 'non-U' for instance, can be understood as a way ascribing value through the process of differentiation. And again, Bourdieu's 'cultural capital' is useful; economic capital may provide access to 'culture' but it does not guarantee the 'appropriate' consumption of it. 'Levelling down' becomes a way of indicating the 'valueless', 'hollow' and 'trivial' nature of certain types and forms of consumption by sections of society who do not *know* how to consume correctly. This takes on a particular complexion in relation to the consumption of American, or Americanised, products. As outlined above, Britain's inequitable economic relationship with America had roused feelings of unease and suspicion (provoked by the realisation of 'inferiority') across diverse sectors of society.

'Unfavourable depictions of the "American way of life" and the American way of business...were hardly novel...but during the War and immediately afterwards these depictions broke more decisively into the arena of public, explicitly *populist* discourse and were circulated in a wider number of printed and broadcast contexts.' (Hebdige, op. cit.: 53)<sup>12</sup>

As Britons experienced improved economic conditions (in real terms), the distinctions between wealth generated through endeavour and ambition - Affluence - and wealth generated through opportunistic and aggressive 'exploitation' - Americanisation - were imbued with values that gained their currency from nationally specific notions of taste and 'propriety'. Put another way, Affluence was 'home grown'; economic and social mobility were the result of staunchly British

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<sup>12</sup>The 'wider arena' that Hebdige refers to includes *Picture Post* and the B.B.C., see Hebdige, op. cit.: 54-5 for examples.

characteristics such as tenacity, perseverance and stamina, and appropriate consumption was marked by prudence. In contrast, Americanisation was 'imported'; a way of life that was brash, fast, meritocratic and unrepentantly predatory. Americanised consumption disregarded social conventions, it was not only conspicuous and eclectic but lacked decorum. Thus, the distinction to be made is not frugal versus comfortable living, but thriftiness versus profligacy. Ostentatious and lavish consumption fell outside of acceptable definitions of British conduct and behaviour.

Of course, the importation of 'foreign' values is central to the questions of 'taste' and 'value' which have already been discussed in relation to Affluence, but concerns about the effect of Americanisation on British 'Culture' were hotly debated in relation to the cinema, and the 'influence' of Hollywood films - particularly as this was seen to impact upon dominant notions of 'popular culture' and 'popular taste'. A detailed consideration of these is outside of the scope of this project and I can do little more than indicate the main points of them here,<sup>13</sup> nevertheless I want to touch briefly on the ways that Americanisation fears were expressed through debates about the relationship between (and the structure of) Hollywood/American and British films, since these can shed extra light on the

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<sup>13</sup>For analyses of a range of issues and debates concerning Britain's post-war film policy, as well as a wider consideration of the social and cultural implications of the relationship (and tensions) between British and Hollywood Cinemas, see, for example, Dickinson, 1983; Dickinson and Street, 1985, especially: 150-98; Higson, 1986; Swann, 1987, especially: 81-143.

ways that Americanisation was articulated from a range of positions that borrowed from and were part of a wider cultural criticism.

In the immediate post-war years, the nature of the British film industry (and the nature of its relationship with Hollywood) was a subject of much debate in the House of Commons. As Margaret Dickinson and Sarah Street write in their account of the relationship between the film industry and the state in Britain:

‘Even though a third of the population went to the cinema at least once a week, film issues were treated in the House as a specialist concern. *Kine Weekly* complained in 1948 that the film debates were poorly attended: “Entertainment is not a subject that MPs take seriously. It is regarded as a sign of grace in a Member when he boasts that he seldom visits the cinema.”...The very question of whether the fate of the film industry should concern the government at all was one which touched on class and class conflict. Films were popular; and although they drew their audiences from all classes, the working class accounted for a major proportion of admissions...Thus an association was made between a serious interest in the cinema and a respect for, or a concern with, the tastes of the working class...there was a relationship between the aim of popularising the culture of the elite and recognising the value or potential value in a cultural form which was already popular.’ (Dickinson and Street, 1985: 152-4)

Dickinson and Street provide examples across a range of political opinions which demonstrate the depth and extent of ‘negative’ attitudes to the cinema in general, and to Hollywood cinema in particular. Thus, in the post-war film debates, politicians from all parties expressed at best an ambiguous, and at worst a contemptuous attitude to cinema that reflected the cultural formation of the ‘dominant classes’, regardless of party political affiliation (see Dickinson and Street, 1985: 152-5). Where, on the one hand, the debates rehearsed established arguments about popular taste and culture which reflected a pre-occupation with

ideas about the 'educative' function of the cinema and the necessity for British films to represent the national character, on the other hand, the debates were also conducted within the framework of 'the problem' of American dominance. As Dickinson and Street argue, "it is clear that the demand to reduce American influence on the screen was in part sustained by general anti-American attitudes" (155). 'Anti-American attitudes' were held both by politicians who were critical of *laissez-faire* capitalism and by those who held 'American culture' in contempt, in so much as it represented the epitome of mass society. Where political differences may have provided different inflections to the expression of fears about the impact of American culture and Hollywood films on notions of Britishness, the articulation of such anxieties had its roots in Britain's changed status (both economic and military) in the post-war world and thus reflected, at some level, the tensions within a culture that was struggling with changes to both social and cultural formations.

The particular expression of fears of Americanisation that found a voice through these parliamentary debates was, to a certain extent, also rooted in debates about post-war cultural policy which, in turn, also raised questions about how to structure (or re-structure) the relationship between the state and 'the arts'. Where the establishment of the Arts Council in 1946 provided a formal structure for state support of the arts, the potential inclusion of the cinema under the umbrella of 'the arts' would tie film production more closely to the state, but would also provide the cinema with state support. This possibility was, as Dickinson and Street suggest, a

cause for some concern among 'elite groups':

'...the suggestion threatened a number of ideas in which the intelligentsia had a vested interest. The subsidising of the art forms most valued by the intellectual elite might render that elite rather less exclusive, but seemed unlikely to undermine the traditions and assumptions which confirmed its superiority and enabled it to set the standards of "quality" and "taste" which would guide policy. To treat the cinema as an art was to disrupt the notion that only the discerning few could recognise or appreciate art. For not only were films made for a large audience, but most of the films which the critics endorsed were apparently appreciated...by the general public.' (op. cit.: 160)

Such a position reflects the pre-occupation with notions of taste and value that were apparent in the writings of Waugh, Hoggart and Orwell mentioned above, but they took on a different emphasis in relation to cinema and this was primarily focused around the perceived threat to national film culture as it was represented by Hollywood. Here, though, the question was related to issues of economic as well as cultural domination. Throughout the war, and in the immediate post-war period, British films had gained in stature and popularity; for instance, a 1946 survey by Granada revealed that "96 per cent of those questioned said that they thought British films had improved whereas only 26 per cent thought that American films had improved" (ibid.: 175). Government film policy during this time reflected a desire to capitalise on this new found popularity (albeit that this was influenced by the ambiguous attitude towards cinema *per se*) but, more importantly, it also reflected attempts to deal with Britain's parlous economic situation through proposals to limit both American imports and profits. (See Dickinson and Street, 1985: 150-69 and 170-98 and Swann, 1987: 81-104 and 127-43 for detailed accounts of government film policy in the early part of the



period.)

In this respect, the film debates of the immediate post-war years highlight the ways that Americanisation was rooted in Britain's economic dependence on the U.S.A.; the expression of resentment about American influence in Britain took place within a (broadly leftist) political climate in which Cold War politics and aggressive capitalism were seen as aspects of America's (economic and ideological) imperialist tendencies. The ways in which fears of American cultural domination were articulated with respect, in particular, to the impact of this on the national film culture, echoed the position represented by the 'negative cultural consensus' and thus shared its views on popular culture, and its audience. 'Popular culture' is that culture consumed, in the majority, by a working-class, or 'mass', audience. The Americanisation of popular culture through the cinema in particular, was seen as an important aspect of what was identified as the levelling-down and trivialisation of 'Culture'; it was the debasement of 'Culture' in this way that would result in a loss of value, or at least the recognition of value, in national cultural products. The discourse of the 'Quality Film' discussed in Chapter 5 is relevant in this respect since it expands on this notion of how the cinema audience was written about at the time, in particular, with respect to the ways that the 'mass audience' is attributed certain characteristics which align it to popular culture.

It is important to note the significance of how Americanisation evoked fears of the corruption, debasement and trivialisation of culture since these terms were also

operant in writing about the cinema audience at this time, as well as being evident in the discussions which followed changes to the structure of broadcasting in the mid-1950s. In both cases the trivial, superficial and shallow products of popular (Americanised) culture are opposed to the serious and authentic nature of British Culture. John Caughie (1986) identifies the importance of understanding the historical and cultural development of broadcasting and cinema in Britain after 1927 (the establishment of the B.B.C. in its present institutional form with Reith as director-general, and the initiation of the British documentary movement by John Grierson) and through to the mid-1950s. In his essay, Caughie establishes the centrality of notions of 'public service' to the development of both broadcasting and cinema in Britain and the relationship between this and the 'ideological impulses' behind histories and chronicles of British broadcasting and cinema:

'As for Reith with broadcasting, so for Grierson with cinema, commerce is the enemy of any serious or moral purpose. For both, the necessary refuge is provided by the service of the public interest which can give broadcasting and cinema their necessary independence from the market place and public taste. It can make them "serious" and lift them out of the realm of mere entertainment. The serious job of broadcasting and cinema is to create an audience rather than simply to pander to it; the public interest which is defined by Reith in terms of religion and morality is defined by Grierson in terms of civic education and informed citizenry...The same terms reverberate backwards and forwards between Reithian broadcasting and Griersonian cinema, forming an ideological and cultural nexus which comes to define the serious purpose of film and television. This seriousness of purpose helps to explain the ferocity of the debate over commercial television in the early 50s, when public service seemed threatened by the debased Americanised values of commercial television.' (Caughie, 1986: 191-3)

The arrival of commercial television in Britain has been cited above (47) as a

significant marker in respect of periodisation. The debates about commercial television and its 'corruption' of the national broadcasting culture are beyond the immediate concerns of this project,<sup>14</sup> nevertheless I would like to make some remarks here about this issue in order to illustrate a shift in the way Americanisation is articulated from the early to later years of the period.

Writing about the introduction of commercial television in September 1955, as well as the build-up to it in previous years, Harry Hopkins (1964: 399-410) indicates a general sense of the profound effects that the arrival of commercial television was seen to herald:

'Earlier innovations in mass-communications had been cold-shouldered and kept in their lowly places for years. But TV not only reported the news, it made it. Each morning at the bus-stop, on the railway platform, in office and shop and factory, there was a new topic of conversation to replace "the weather"...It was: "Did you see So-and-So on television last night?"...It was not thus surprising that for many long troubled by the uneasy feeling that civilisation was collapsing about them, the arrival of television should seem to mark the beginning of the end.' (Hopkins, *op. cit.*: 400-2)

As Hopkins goes on to discuss, between the appointment of the Beveridge Committee on Broadcasting in 1949 and the first broadcast from independent television late in 1955, expressions of uneasiness about the new media reflected something of the nature of the 'ferocious debates' that surrounded the issue of broadcasting at this time:

"Like the debate over the Comprehensive School in the Forties this was a

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<sup>14</sup>For analyses of Britain's broadcasting history see, for instance, Corner, 1991; Caughie, 1986 and 1991.

debate which might almost have been staged as a symbolic confrontation. For though in origin an historical accident, the B.B.C. had been all but absorbed into the unwritten Constitution. Under war and postwar pressures...its social prestige remained immense, its position apparently impregnable. The challenge to the B.B.C. monopoly was a head-on challenge to tradition, hierarchy, British received values.

At the same time the debate sharply illuminated the central dilemma of this critical stage of social transition. If, in the name of Democracy, Freedom, Equality, one delivered the people from hierarchical bondage, was one merely, in effect, surrendering them to another, and possibly worse, enslavement?

It was an issue which - particularly on the Right - cut briskly across party lines and again suggested their inadequacy to the real world of the Fifties. There were many Tories in whom the old faith in the hierarchical order and attendant authoritarian culture outweighed their party's latter-day subscription to the values of competitive commercial enterprise...There were likewise some Socialists for whom the joys of deliverance from the Squirearchy of Broadcasting House loomed larger than the perils of commercial corruption." (ibid.: 405)

As with the earlier film debates then, 'opposition' was not confined to party politics but, more importantly, it was organised around the same fears and anxieties: fears of the corruption of established hierarchies of taste and value which were rooted in both class relations and in a belief in the 'educative' and 'serious' purpose of broadcasting: commercialisation would undermine the 'public service' ethos in the same way that Hollywood cinema threatened to undermine the projection of an identifiable 'Britishness' through a national cinema. For Hopkins, the debates about the commercialisation of television were overshadowed by a primary concern: Americanisation.

'The spectre which haunted the debates...was that of final and irrevocable "Americanisation". For many, this was decisive. There was much public shuddering over horrific details brought back from the United States by hardy travellers - "Hamlet with dentrifice ads." or the awful warning of the Coronation film which had been interlarded on American TV with

commercials featuring a Mr. Fred J. Muggs, a chimpanzee. Many devoutly agreed with the writer of a letter to *The Times*: After all, "we do not allow salesmen to walk at will into our homes nor to paste display advertisements upon our walls."

Others, however, contrasted the "vitality" and "richness" of competitive broadcasting with the monopolistic "complacency" or "grandmotherly" attitudes of the B.B.C., death to all true art and enterprise...The battle was highly organised, with heavy artillery brought up on both sides...But - as Lord Beveridge observed in the House of Lords debate - "Money talks". And Money's voice had never been so well modulated or so pervasive in our society.' (ibid.: 405-6)

In the same way that the immediate post-war film debates had been compromised to an extent by economic pressures, the commercial television debates were compromised by the tensions represented in the desire to maintain "proper balance", "good taste and decency", and a "high general standard of quality" (Hopkins: 407), against the apparently unstoppable march of consumer capitalism which demanded an ever increasing participation in consumer culture along American lines. This was not simply a struggle over access to broadcasting *per se*, but a struggle over the nature and character of a medium which, it was recognised, would precipitate an irrevocable shift in the national culture:

'...the arrival of commercial television in the closing months of 1955 [was] the first real indication of the explosion which, over the next two years, was to bring with it supermarkets and coffee bars, the revolt of the young, and a complete change in the prevailing social climate. In fact the battle of a tiny pressure group to establish the new medium, and to break the B.B.C. monopoly over British broadcasting, had hung over English life for some years - provoking bitter opposition ranging from that of the traditional Establishment and the Church ("for the sake of our children" the Archbishop of York had declared "we should resist it") to the Labour Party's claim that it would be "a national disaster". The violence of this opposition had been an implicit recognition of just what a major innovation in English life this involved. And indeed in retrospect, it can be seen that this new arrival, the first taste of the values of affluence and of the vast

approaching wave of “Americanisation”, was one of the two or three major turning points in post-war English social history.’ (Booker, 1970 (1969): 103)

However, where the terms of the film and television debates shared concerns - both organised, for instance, around fears about the ‘effects’ of mass culture on ‘working-class audiences’, and both concerned with the ways that ‘imported’ values would affect concepts and representations of the nation - which were articulated through recourse to the terms associated with Americanisation (corruption, debasement, commercialisation), the different contexts within which these debates took place gives them a different emphasis. One aspect of the expansion of broadcasting was, quite literally, an expansion of the world - after 1955, the ownership of television licences mushroomed (from less than 764,000 in 1951 to 10.5 million by the end of the 1950s, see Hill, 1986: 35), but purchase of a licence signified more than simply buying access to television programmes. As Tim O’Sullivan (1991) shows, television ownership was seen partly as a way of symbolising ‘status and modernity...The act of getting a television seems to be remembered above all as a sign of progress, a visible sign of joining, or at least of not being left out of , “the new”.’ (166) Significantly though, this symbol of modernity exposed audiences to new horizons, such that by the late 1950s

‘...such topical weekly programmes as Panorama (with an audience of eight or nine millions) really were opening “a window on the world” in no merely metaphorical sense. Vast numbers of citizens who had never read beyond the sports pages or travelled much further than Southend now moved around the terror-ridden cities of Algeria, watched excited Arabs in billowing burnouses harranguing crowds in the hard bright light of the Persian Gulf, or saw what it was like to stand in the bread-lines in the

United States. Nasser in his Cairo garden, Khrushchev in full spate in Moscow, Eisenhower gravely reasonable in the White House, appeared on the screen in the sitting-room, answered or parried questions, revealing in the process every grimace and inflexion.

The world was peopled as never before.

And the nation was peopled, too. The "man-in-the-street", "the workers", "the boss", were, no longer merely symbolic figures: they were there, on the screen, their opinions endlessly solicited by omnipresent television reporters...

In this way...the logic of television as a medium added its force both to the Egalitarianism of 1945 - of the "Beveridge Revolution" - and the Equality of 1955 - of the conveyor-belt - to close - or at least narrow - the old social and cultural gulfs in the nation.' (Hopkins, op. cit.: 408)

This sense of the democratising impulse of television is important since it indicates both the 'modernity' that television symbolised, and identifies the primary 'problem' it represented: that of increased exposure to 'Americanised values'. Even within the context of the 'classless society' of Affluence, the anxieties expressed about the processes of Americanisation which television represented, were focused on the increasing commercialisation of British culture. We come back, then, to fears of the corrupting influence of 'imported' tastes and values - those tastes and values, welcomed and celebrated by sections of the populace ('youth' and 'women' who were, by now, firmly stitched into the discourses of Affluence and consumerism) and seen to be, an 'effect' of shifting class and social relations in mid- to late-1950s Britain, but these were simultaneously identified as aspects of modernity that threatened to undermine established notions of Britishness. It is important to register that the terms with which such fears were expressed are consistent across the period and, as such, can be seen to echo notions of propriety and taste that, as I discussed in relation to Austerity, have their roots in

pre-war social relations and hierarchies. Thus, the insistence on 'proper balance', 'good taste and decency', particularly in the advertising content of Independent television, can be seen partly as an attempt to maintain established notions of the 'public service ethos', as well as certain accompanying notions such as the susceptibility of audiences to popular cultural products, but also partly as tacit acceptance of a new, consumer based, culture which depended upon the participation (and education) of the populace in new patterns and forms of consumption.

Where the aspects of Americanisation that have been discussed were rooted in a more general context of shifting class and social relations, the points at which Americanisation debates touched discourses of 'appropriate' femininity gave them a different emphasis. Here, fears of the Americanisation of British culture take on a particular significance since, as we shall see in Chapter 6, it is precisely through the representation of a femininity that is constructed in an *Americanised Affluence* (American 'tastes and values' incorporated into Affluence such that they undermine notions of Britishness accrued to it) that 'the problem' of a late-50s femininity is articulated. Thus, attention has been paid not so much to the debates about British versus Hollywood Cinema, or Independent versus 'state run' television in themselves, but to what they can reveal about the cultural and social shifts in Britain at this time, and how these can then be understood in relation to notions of femininity, appropriate womanliness. Thus, a further aspect of Americanisation begins to appear: the ways in which it was evoked as a response



to anxieties about a shifting national culture and character as revealed through changing attitudes towards consumption, particularly as these involved women's differently emphasised role as consumer. It then becomes possible to see how 'Americanisation' functions as a 'shorthand' to articulate the inappropriateness of certain modes of behaviour and standards of decorum which, as I will show in later Chapters, were seen to cheapen or corrupt a hierarchy of taste and values.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>With respect to this issue of 'appropriate' modes of behaviour and standards of decorum, two *Picture Post* articles from the mid- to late-1940s are relevant. The first, from April 6, 1946, illustrates how dominant notions of 'taste' and 'acceptable' patterns of consumption operated with respect to ideas of the construction and presentation of an 'appropriate' femininity in the immediate post-war years. The article invokes the image of wealthy, 'expensively dressed' Parisiennes. These were women who had operated the Black Market throughout wartime and their 'indiscriminate' and conspicuous consumption, coupled with their 'unrefined' appearance were seen to undermine notions of elegance and good taste that attached to the image of the 'smart Parisienne' - a synecdoche for sophisticated, discrete, elegant womanly woman who creates and presents herself according to the dictats of accepted and appropriate bourgeois style and modes of behaviour.

The second *Picture Post* article (May 21, 1949) deals with the tensions caused by the presence of American G.I.s in Warrington in the late 1940s. Distanced by some years from expressions of uneasiness concerning American soldiers based in Britain throughout the war whilst British men were away from home, this article re-evokes fears of the 'corrupting influence' of American attitudes, behaviour and habits through reference to the ways in which the G.I.'s conduct in the town was seen as a source of 'irritation' and 'offence'. Significantly, the article focuses on the relationship between the G.I.'s presence in the town and the 'effect' this had on young women in the area. In this respect, the article's account of disruptions in the town, and at the American air-base where the soldiers were stationed, shifts discussion from the 'problem' of the G.I.'s habits and behaviours onto the 'unacceptable' behaviour of young women who were 'lured' to the air-base by 'money, food, chocolates and nylons' and the expectation of 'a good time'. Characterised as prostitutes and 'good time girls' these young women are represented as failing to meet acceptable standards of conduct and behaviour, indeed, they are presented as almost 'helpless' to resist the lure of consumerism that the American soldiers are seen to embody. In each of these *Picture Post* articles, the issue of 'appropriate' (womanly)

From the preceeding accounts of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation, the extent to which these are suffused with notions of correct behaviour should be apparent; the way that Americanisation has been presented throws into sharper relief the tensions across correctness, class and the national character that are contained in Austerity and Affluence, and which each attempts to 'manage'. Each of the three terms is embedded in a particular set of economic and political relations, but whilst these may provide a grounding, the various fears and anxieties that are articulated through these terms find their most powerful expression in wider cultural terms, and in a range of cultural products.

Before I proceed to discuss these in relation to selected films of the period I want to establish further the ways that the social and economic context of the period had its impact on women's lives. The purpose of this is to gain a clearer sense of women's experience of the time and, through this, to understand more clearly the relationships between, and tensions across, these experiences and the presentation of preferred femininities in selected British films. Accordingly, the following chapter looks at women's lives through the period with specific reference to the tension created between women's relationship to both employment and the home.

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behaviour and conduct is related to, on the one hand, a refusal of dominant notions of propriety and decency and, on the other, to a wholehearted and indiscriminate acceptance of Americanised styles of conspicuous consumption and instant gratification.

### CHAPTER THREE: Women and Social Context - 'Work' and 'the Home'

"I seriously think that the war itself made the women of Britain think seriously about their future, their likes and dislikes and they told themselves, no one is going to put us down in the future, we are not going to be the little woman who follows the man around. We are going to make a career for ourselves, earn a salary and stand on our own two feet." (O. Dickinson)

"...Our generation has had the hardest job of all women, in my opinion, as we have seen a revolution take place with regard to women's status (not yet really resolved) and as well as adjusting our own thinking have lived with husbands who were brought up to look on women as home makers primarily...many, like me, have for years literally done two full time jobs." (D. Hayles)

'The work I did didn't particularly give me (much) more confidence in myself - I don't think I even thought about it - I just carried on living, started a family when HE came home...I think the war effort made by women was looked upon by both sexes as just a wartime thing, and then "lets get back to normal"! I gave up my job, had a baby - it was all so normal - rationing, queuing.' (J. Daber)

These extracts give three accounts of the experience of women in Britain throughout the 40s and into the 50s. Of roughly the same age and social background<sup>1</sup> these writers recollect different experiences of work and home,

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<sup>1</sup>O. Dickinson was born in 1926, between 1940 until her marriage in 1952 she was employed in shop and factory work before going on to train as a typist, from 1952 onwards she and her husband managed a paint shop.  
D. Hayles was born in 1927 and was employed as a secretary between 1943-52; she was married in 1949, had her first child in 1952 when she returned to part-time work 'almost immediately', until the birth of her second child in 1955, she went back to work in 1961.  
J. Daber was born in 1925, during the war she worked as a secretary, she was married in 1944, stopped paid employment in 1945 and had her first child in 1947.

marriage and domesticity, and struggles over perceptions of women's roles and capabilities. Women's lives changed considerably throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and this was accompanied by changes to women's perceptions of themselves and their capacities, but the story is not uniform and the experience of life in this period was fraught with contradictions and competing discourses. The presentation of 1945-1958 as a period marked by Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation in Chapter 2 has provided a context within which to consider interrelations between the social and discursive shaping of (ideal, normative and deviant) femininities in the period and - and in part through - the *gendered* articulation of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation themselves.

Part of this process can be seen by looking at the ways that Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation privileged preferred femininities (primarily presented in relation to class and patterns of consumption) providing them with an ideological force not always consonant with the changing patterns of women's lives. If we pay attention to women's employment patterns and the impact of these on their domestic and maternal roles, we can begin to examine women's relationship to the public sphere and consider the ways in which women were addressed as workers and citizens, quite often in contrast to ways they were addressed as 'womanly' women - as wives and/or mothers. For this project, the issue of women's place in the public sphere is especially pertinent since the Second World War saw women entering the arena of work on an unprecedented scale and in the post-war period the renegotiation of women's place in Britain was connected to the reconstruction

of British society in ways that secured those roles for subsequent years. The context of this reconstruction is vital if we are to understand the ways that the experience of femininity was mediated by both discourse and representation, for it will be shown in subsequent Chapters that the ways women were represented in both critical writing about the female audience and in selected British films through the 40s and 50s was filtered through a range of discursive strategies that functioned to foreground precise meanings for femininity.

The following contextualisation is an attempt to combine what might be called more sociologically based historical accounts (such as those represented in work by, for instance, the Birmingham Feminist History Group (BFHG) (1979), Minns (1980), Wilson (1980), Summerfield (1984) and Lewis (1992)), with one that considers the relationship between, and the tensions created by, social change, ideology and women's own accounts of their experiences of the period. It is through such an analysis and in the light of the discussions introduced in the preceding chapter, that we can begin to see how notions of femininity were arrived at through a variety of defining and competing discourses that resulted in both the presentation of specific notions of womanliness, and in the creation of a subject position for women that became increasingly difficult to maintain. The gap between Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation and women's experiences at this time allows us to see how the presentation of 'appropriate' or 'proper' womanliness became more problematic and was subjected to progressively concerted attempts by the dominant culture to contain and limit the 'realities' of

post-war femininity and the worlds that women inhabited.

The range of existing texts on this period focusing specifically on femininity have been written largely from within a sociological or historical tradition paying little attention either to questions of discourse and representation<sup>2</sup> on the one hand, or to the individual voices of women on the other. The object of this chapter is not to duplicate existing social histories (although this is to some extent unavoidable) but to establish how the framing of femininity by Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation relates to social changes in women's lives at this time and provides a very particular context for (the discussion of) cultural texts. Thus, this chapter utilises existing commentaries to illustrate the complexity and contradiction in women's social positioning throughout the late 40s and 50s. In some sense, context is less important than what can be made *from* it; whilst the grounding that social context provides is important, the main drive of this chapter derives from how this can facilitate discussion of the specific effects of the gendering of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation and how these are then exemplified in films from the period.

**"WILL THE WOMEN GO BACK?"**

**The hoardings appeal for more women workers. 75,000 are needed in the textile industries alone. Most of them will have to be married women..."** (*Picture Post*, July 19, 1947.)

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<sup>2</sup>Denise Riley's analyses of this period represent an exception to this trend, and her accounts have been influential in what follows. See Riley, 1981 and 1983.

The mobilisation of women into the workforce during World War II has been widely researched and detailed (see, for instance, Minns, 1980, Summerfield, 1984) and the extent to which women left the public arena of paid work in favour of the private sphere at the end of the war is an area that has received attention within feminist writing, frequently focused around the issue of the apparent demise of feminism at this time (see for instance: BFHG, 1979; Wilson, 1980; Winship, 1987)<sup>3</sup>. The focus here is rather on particular themes in the post-war period; this necessitates a recognition of women's situation throughout the Second World War but it also requires attention to how women's wartime situation was renegotiated in the post-war period. The work done by feminist writers on the position of women in post-war Britain is valuable for the historical and social detail it provides and it is accepted that our comprehension of these years and our understanding of women's position at this time is different as a result of such historical work. Studies by writers such as Wilson, Summerfield and Minns also reflect shifts in what might be called the dominant feminist discourse on the period - the development of a critique of the myth of compliance and comprehensive containment in the years immediately following World War II. This project is concerned to account for the processes by which multiple discourses, with different

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<sup>3</sup>The perception that the post-war period was marked by the 'achievement of feminist goals' was expressed contemporaneously in journal articles such as "The Feminists Mop Up", *The Economist*, April 21, 1956: 242-3. Whilst the status of feminism as a political force and as a collective identity is not the issue here, the extent to which the post-war period was characterised and understood as one of equality and consensus is, this will be discussed in more detail below.

registers and operating fields, produced femininities. In reality women's lives and the ways they 'imagine' themselves and other women, are far more complex than any single account can testify, and different perceptions of femininity are influenced by issues of class and, in the later part of the period, by social mobility and patterns of consumption. These are the issues this chapter seeks to address.

In this outline, priority is given to the immediate post-war period. Whilst this may appear to emphasise the few years which overlap the ending of the war through to the late-1940s, these years are important: it is at this time that we can see the establishment of patterns of employment for women which were to last throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. At the same time, the question of women's employment in these years had a particular impact on related areas such as domesticity, motherhood and childcare, issues that were raised consistently in relation to concerns about women's role (in both the present and the future) as 'proper' wives and mothers.

In the conclusion to her survey of women and work in the Second World War, Penny Summerfield has argued that

"Women were not expelled from paid work after the war. They were drawn into it along lines which followed the pre-war pattern...decline continued in textiles and clothing and domestic service, but increased numbers of both men and women were employed in food, drink and tobacco, distribution, miscellaneous manufacturing, chemicals and other expanding industries. The number of women continued to increase, not just absolutely but also proportionately, in industries like engineering, vehicles, metal, gas, water and electricity and transport. Even though there was a fall from the high wartime proportions of women in these industries, women formed a larger



part of their workforces in 1950 than they had done in 1939.”  
(Summerfield, 1984: 187)

A *Picture Post* article from July 19, 1947 supports this in its statement that “...there are still over 700,000 more women in industry now than before the war...” and statistically the proportion of women employed outside of the home rose consistently, although not dramatically, in each of the relevant census periods. For instance, the number of married women in paid employment throughout this period shows that in 1931, 10% of women in the female labour force were married, in 1951 this was 26% and by 1961, 35% (Lewis, 1992: 65 and 70, see also Lewis: 65 and Table 3; and Summerfield, Appendix B: 196).

The issue here though is not simply the numbers of women who were in paid employment throughout the period, it is also important to consider the occupations in which they were employed and how this both reflected and influenced particular understandings about women’s role/s in society at this time. For, although women were consistently undertaking paid employment throughout the period, the types of work in which they were engaged did not reflect a widespread acceptance of women as workers per se, nor were they employed on equal terms in relation to male workers. Nevertheless, the need for post-war reconstruction was such that women as well as men, released from both the armed forces and munitions work in 1945 (although for some, demobilisation began as early as 1943, see Summerfield, op. cit.: 189), were targeted and addressed as *the* labour force capable of carrying out the tasks needed to re-establish Britain’s manufacturing base and infrastructure.

This recognition of the necessity for women in large numbers to join the labour force is clearly evident in the 1947 *Picture Post* article mentioned above which also places women workers in 'female' occupations:

"...the Government has launched a drive for 75,000 more workers. Most of them will have to be women since they are the only large reserve of labour - apart from the Services - to draw upon; and a large proportion of the women who come back into cotton, spinning and weaving, woollens and worsted, silk, rayon and nylon (if they come back) will be married. Research has shown that the likeliest recruits are women of 35 and over, who have previous industrial experience, and whose children are mostly at school... Younger married women, with smaller children, may provide a source of part-time work, but the Government's appeal is not aimed at them since, in officialese, *it is not contemplated that married women with infant children should put aside their duties as mothers.*" (*Picture Post*, July 19, 1947, my emphasis.)

*Picture Post* represents one arena through which women were addressed in such a way as to make their position in post-war Britain ambiguous and difficult to maintain. This is related to both issues of nationhood and femininity; on the one hand, women were addressed as 'womanly', with a special responsibility to care for and nurture current and future generations of workers, whilst at the same time, women were themselves expected to accommodate their maternal and domestic roles to the priorities of the nation and the task of reconstruction. Of course, these two do not preclude one another, the role of domestic support was also seen as an important aspect of the drive towards social cohesion after the War, but it is my argument that women were placed in a very particular set of roles by the demands of Austerity which made their position somewhat ambiguous: were they to be wives and mothers, or workers? If both, then how could they maintain successfully either role when the implication was that the choice was really *either/or*?

The labour drive was supported by various government departments and officially sponsored surveys such as the 1947 *Economic Survey* which foresaw a shortfall in the labour force in the immediate future that would undermine production targets and thus called for “women who are in the position to do so to enter industry” (cited in Lewis op. cit.: 71). Moreover, the survey suggested further that employers should “adjust the conditions of work to suit, so far as possible, the convenience of women with household responsibilities” (ibid.: 72). Emphasis was placed on the requirements of the manufacturing industries (such as clothing, iron and steel) but there was also a shortage in professions such as nursing and teaching (see Wilson, 1980: 44; Lewis: 71-2). The necessity for women to enter the labour market notwithstanding, working life for women with ‘household responsibilities’, even in those areas where there was an extra need for women workers, was not easy as the following extract testifies:

“I don’t remember 50s women being urged to stay at home! On the contrary, we were needed in the schools [...] I didn’t lose my so-called war-time gain because an enriched pay-cheque meant a home could be paid for.  
Finding nursery accommodation for a 4 year old required ingenuity. Yes - this was difficult in the 50s. Young children were not allowed for!” (J. Cadogan)

The 1949 *Royal Commission on Population*<sup>4</sup> recognised the conflict between work, domesticity and motherhood (Weeks, 1989: 236), and according to Lewis this *Report* “anticipated the increasing demand for women’s labour and welcomed the

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<sup>4</sup>Although established in 1944, the report was almost redundant by the time its findings were published in 1949 as the forecast ‘population scare’ was fading. See Riley, 1981: 89-91, and Weeks, 1989: 232-5

idea of women doing two jobs" (72).

The reality of women's involvement in paid employment at this time subverts dominant accounts that had women 'returning to the home' in the post-war years (both in respect of Government appeals and the recognised need for a workforce to carry out the reconstruction of Britain's industrial base), but it is also true that simultaneously, appeals to women as workers were couched in terms that revealed ultimately a rigid structure of gender differentiation in relation to women and work. Thus, the paradoxical situation of the immediate post-war period led to both appeals for the re-establishment and promotion of ideals of family life and campaigns aimed at recruiting women into the labour force. Women were seen as necessary entrants into the labour force but only under certain conditions: paid employment should be supplementary to their domestic and maternal duties.<sup>5</sup> As Wilson outlines, the 1946 *Royal Commission on Equal Pay* was underpinned by the assumption that there were "two kinds of women. You could either be a wife and mother or a single career woman." (1980: 45) And in her discussion of the Fabian Society's evidence to the *Royal Commission on Population* Denise Riley identifies the tension embodied in much 'official' thinking on the question of

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<sup>5</sup>It is not the intention here to assume an unproblematic association between marriage and maternity although there is a slippage between these terms. This outline is provided to give a general picture of the material conditions of women's lives throughout the period; the assumption of marriage = motherhood is accepted in so far as it reflects much contemporary literature and in that it is more likely than not to be the case that the majority of married women at this time were also mothers.

women and work as being that between 'good citizenship' and 'good maternalism' (see Riley, 1981: 100-2). Accordingly,

'[m]otherhood was an important job: but marriage alone was no justification for abstention from work. Not only that, but "a woman, like a man, has a duty to the community to work to the full extent of her capacities all her working life and...the exercise of her special function of maternity cannot occupy her full-time for more than a portion of it." More part-time jobs should therefore be available, and jobs in which the experience of maternity afforded a positive advantage - teaching and welfare work...In the aspirations of 1945 progressiveness, women in production would work on the same terms as men; women at home, i.e. mothers, would pull their weight within the community.' (Riley, 1981: 102. The extract contained in this quote is from the Fabian Society's *Population and the People*, 1946.)

The particular tenor of this extract may in some ways reflect the Fabian Society's own particular brand of democratic socialism but the notion of the 'sexless citizen', working for the collective benefits of the 'community' is not a unique concept at this time (see Riley, 1981: 74-5) and it resonates with a general post-war desire for and celebration of egalitarianism. As discussed in Chapter 2, the immediate post-war years were marked by an egalitarian impulse but it was also the case that Austerity constructed working-class womanliness as both domesticated and hard-working, crucial to national reconstruction. We can see here how women were put under a considerable burden by these twin pressures. Moreover, it is the case that in reality the majority of 'women's work' did not follow an egalitarian pattern, particularly in the case of part-time, married women workers who tended to be occupied in semi- or un-skilled work that was accorded low status and was unequally rewarded. The status of women workers and assumptions about them appears to have followed closely the dichotomy identified by Wilson: women as

*either* wives and mothers *or* single career women (it was still the case that women were required to leave certain jobs, such as the Civil Service, when they married or had children). The latter were assumed to be professionals - teachers, Civil Servants - and therefore, implied the 1946 *Report*, should be awarded equal pay with men in the same professions. The former group however, were seen to be less highly skilled, working-class women who were also seen as temporary or transient workers. This group of women workers, primarily employed in manual labour, were not to be treated as equal to their male counterparts since, it was argued, they were less physically strong, they were more prone to absenteeism and they demonstrated, apparently, "a certain relative lack of flexibility in response to rapidly changing or abnormal situations" (1946 *Equal Pay Report*, cited in Wilson, 1980: 45). It followed therefore, that they did not make a contribution equal to that of men and could not be treated equally in terms of pay.

The *Equal Pay Report* was clearly informed by a range of assumptions and opinions about women and work - most of which can be traced back to concerns about motherhood and domesticity (Wilson, 1980: 46); these are far reaching and diverse, and whilst such a position could be 'explained' through an examination of Trades Union leaders' desire to protect male jobs and members, two other factors must also be considered. First, the class basis for the differential treatment of professional versus manual, unskilled women workers; secondly, how the different situations of these two groups was effective in relation to their desire to continue working. Most unskilled, manual workers were likely to be working-class, as

opposed to the middle-class professional or career woman. The areas of work in which 'career women' were engaged were more comfortable, more highly rewarded, more prestigious and more highly recognised (moreover, most middle- or upper middle-class women would not have worked *unless* they were trained professionals). For working-class 'wives and mothers' attempting to combine two roles however, working conditions provided only basic amenities, were poorly paid and given low prestige and recognition. Indeed, it was in manufacturing, textile and heavy industries that women were needed for work and yet it was precisely in these areas that the potential gains and appeals of continuing or returning to work held the least power (see above *Picture Post*, July 19, 1947). Many semi- or un-skilled wartime women workers had been employed in monotonous, tedious jobs in manufacturing industry; years of hard physical labour, coupled with the continued demands of running a home and/or caring for children, plus the stress placed on women by the rationing and shortages of wartime meant that many women hitherto employed as manual workers were simply tired.

"Many women, possibly the majority of married women, have not enjoyed their new independence; they have been made miserable by the wartime interruptions of family life. As a result, many married women, perhaps the majority, fervently wish themselves back into their pre-war home routine. A number of wives to whom I have talked are so homesick for their pre-war way of life that they seem to have created in their imagination a glowing fantasy of what life was like. All the small yet grinding irritations of domesticity are forgotten." (Margaret Goldsmith, *Women and the Future*, 1946, cited in Riley, 1981: 81.)

Whilst this may have been the perception of some, it is also true that many women had gained enormously from the freedom from home ties throughout the wartime

period. Two examples from the questionnaires serve to illustrate the feelings of independence and self determination experienced by some women who were freed from the constraints and attentions of husband or father, and the subsequent problems and frustration that 're-adjustment' entailed:

'...my Mother experienced a freedom and financial independence she had never known, because she was doing a job she loved, in "fantasy land" - the cinema...my Mother's comment to my Father on his return from the Army after the war was - "I've changed." My Father forced her to give up her job as an usherette...for the pathetic reason that he wanted her at home at night. This had a disastrous effect upon her health and in no way helped the marriage - which had, inevitably altered.' (P. Brandreth)

"My own mother worked as a dolly holder during the war in the Aircraft factory...it made a totally different person of her. Made her see that there was much more to being married than staying at home to cook and bring up children. She became a very independent person...my father, who at first when he came home from the war, couldn't get used to the change. He never liked her to wear make-up, go anywhere without him, go dancing. But it had all changed, she had worked and brought us up by herself for six years. And she wasn't going back to the little housewife. He came to love and respect her for what she had become." (R. Frost)

These examples suggest that women's experiences of this time were diverse, nevertheless the basis on which women's attitudes to work in the immediate post-war years were judged was one that reflected a particular class position on the issue and thus, the fatigue and boredom which was seen to characterise the attitudes of the majority of women workers towards continued employment was not echoed by all workers, particularly skilled workers. Goldsmith quotes the Labour MP for Jarrow, Ellen Wilkinson, as follows:

"The woman who is finding factory work hard physically longs for that return, but I have not yet found the woman who has interesting and responsible work who wants to give it up just to be a wife and mother in a small house." (cited in Riley, 1981: 81)



A short selection of comments from the questionnaires and follow-up letters further illustrates the contradictory and diverse range of women's experience of and attitudes towards work in the immediate post-war period and into the 1950s. We have seen how the interrelations between Austerity and femininity produced roles for women that were difficult to maintain - juggling between nation and self, family, work. The following extracts - not necessarily new or representative - constitute a variety of responses to work, domesticity and marriage and read in relation to the biographical notes of each respondent (contained in footnotes) they also reveal the tensions and ambiguities represented by attempts to combine work with more 'traditional' female 'duties'.

"[F]or many of us the war had been an exciting time of fun and freedom, lots of dances and lots of men. Certainly women were freer, and jobs after marriage were de rigueur...Girls of my generation were brought up to believe, by influence and example rather than direction, that marriage was the ultimate (and only) goal. One might dally with the idea of a career - never, heaven forbid, a *job* - but those who went to University were regarded as blue-stockings and...were very unlikely indeed to find a husband." (P. Holbeche)<sup>6</sup>

"[M]y life changed completely during the war. After a short time in a clerical job, I was directed into industry and a whole new world opened up for me. Before long, I was having to live away from home, managing my own life and taking on more responsibility. From a very young and immature 21 year old I developed into, I hope, a self-sufficient, confident woman." (M. Hodgins)<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Born in 1919, this woman worked throughout the war first as a nurse and then a tracer, tracing plans for aeroplanes. She continued to work part-time (as a tracer and as a private secretary) between 1945 and 1958 in between being a housewife and mother. She married in 1945 to a Cambridge graduate who later became a schoolmaster.

<sup>7</sup>Also born in 1919, this woman worked as a clerk at the Ministry of Labour and then as a laboratory mechanic throughout the war. She married in 1949 to a

'...I think women failed to realise their potential both during and after the war. Many of those who were in the Women's Forces must have tackled duties normally carried out by men, but I recall that it was all "just until the men come home then we can go back to our slot i.e. the domestic routine". Even post-war (and following the independence and capability displayed by women) the be-all and end-all of their ambitions was still to be wives and mothers. Four women who worked in my office at that time left to start a family the minute their husbands returned from the war. They were holding down good jobs too, and I have often wondered if they experienced regret.' (J. Murby)<sup>8</sup>

'I was 19 in 1950 and I can't recall any of my friends going back to work after marriage, I didn't, it wasn't the "done" thing...A man was supposed to earn enough to keep wife and family, which the majority did.' (A. Green)<sup>9</sup>

The comments from the first three respondents correspond with contemporary writing in that they mirror the recognition of 'changed times', women's different attitudes towards and experiences of paid employment, and their desires and hopes for the future. In these comments, as in the various government reports and surveys of the time, different experiences and expectations are linked to both class and marital status. The final comment, if read in relation to J. Cadogan<sup>10</sup> (above, 123) also reflects the alliance between class, marriage and work experiences; in

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production assistant at BOAC and continued to work herself as a laboratory assistant until 1954.

<sup>8</sup>Married in 1949 to an engineer, this woman was an invoice typist between 1943 and 1947 and a bus conductress between 1947 and 1949.

<sup>9</sup>This woman did not work at all until her children were older; she lived with her parents until she married, her father worked as a gardener and school caretaker, her mother a dinner lady. She was born in 1931 and in 1952 married an 'agricultural engineer'.

<sup>10</sup>Born in 1926, Joyce Cadogan was a student at Durham University between 1946 and 1949. She started teaching in 1954 after marrying a schoolmaster in 1949.

addition, they reveal a difference in expectations and ambitions that can in part be understood in terms of and educational and generational differences. But more importantly, it is apparent from A. Green and J. Cadogan's recollections that the tensions between work and maternity were more pronounced in the latter part of the period when, as I shall discuss below, the 'pressures' on women to choose *either/or*, career or motherhood, were greater. Whilst all of these extracts provide some continuity across the period, they embody also some of the contradictory elements in the *idea* of women and work that were to become more pronounced throughout the 1950s.

The tension between 'work' and 'home', employment and domesticity, may have been somewhat diffused by the social and economic exigencies of the immediate post-war period, but an awareness of the contradictory nature of women's situation underpinned much contemporary 'official' thinking and writing on the subject of women and employment. It has been argued that post-war concentration on 'the family' - of which anxieties about women's place in the public sphere were a corollary - was a continuation of wartime concerns:

'...reading contemporary books and articles makes it clear that "the family" was a preoccupation all through the war; that anticipation of post-war social reforms had a wider base than the immediate clustering of excitement around the Beveridge report on Social Insurance and Allied Services in 1942; and that there was no imposed and concerted drive to reinstate the family "from above" at the immediate end of the war. The social reforms introduced by the Labour government in 1945 were in this sense a consolidation of what had been established under the Coalition government.' (Riley, 1981: 98.)

This suggests that feelings of unease about women workers, particularly if they

were married with children, was not confined to the 1940s and 50s and that it is difficult to establish a unified and concerted attempt to promote 'the family'. However, it can be seen that throughout the 1950s the position of women as both mothers and workers was subjected to heightened scrutiny in a way that was distinctive and that articulated a number of unspoken fears and anxieties specific to the period. Furthermore, it is also important to establish that this process was closely tied in with the presentation of femininity in Affluence and that consequently, women were addressed in particular ways that reveal how 1950s womanliness was constructed around a cluster of anxieties about women's place in the domestic realm as well as in the public sphere and, importantly, their role as consumers.

Denise Riley's exemplary studies of the discourses of 'pronatalism'<sup>11</sup> at the end of W.W.II in Britain provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the moment at which various pronouncements and ideologies about working mothers established themselves and had a particular flavour (see Riley 1981 and 1983). Here I want to take up the strands already identified in relation to the immediate post-war period and show how the particular assumptions about womanliness - specifically femininity and motherhood in opposition to and tension with work - that characterised and underpinned 'official' Affluence, provided a basis for subsequent

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<sup>11</sup>By pronatalism she means: "that despondency and alarm over the low birth rate, both past and as anticipated by demographers, which took the solution to the problem to be encouraging women to have more children" 1983: 151.

arguments that amplified and played upon these tensions.

It has already been established that increasing numbers of women went out to work throughout the 40s and 50s and that this trend was reflected in the numbers of married women workers also. The particular social and economic context of the immediate post-war period meant that there were competing claims on women's time and that there were also contradictions in the ways that women were addressed as both workers (essential for post-war reconstruction) and mothers and wives (essential for the re-establishment of a stable, family based society following the dislocations of wartime). Thus, appeals to women in the early part of the period addressed them as democratic citizens (workers) and, at the same time, as individuals with a special role and responsibility for caring and nurturing (mothers and wives). This rhetorical construction of women as having two roles, coupled with the practical difficulties of occupying both at a time when the childcare provisions of the previous years were being run down

'...fitted in very well with the actual conditions and forms of women's work during the war years, where everything accentuated the sense of "for the duration only". Far from war work serving to revolutionise the terms of women's employment on any serious level, it was itself characterised as an exceptional but valiant effort, which women could thankfully slink away from in peacetime. This process got well underway by the mid 1950s. Sociological commentaries stated that women had freely withdrawn from paid work, despite the fact that such a withdrawal was neither "free" nor neatly occurring anyway. Popular psychological writings, drawing upon the "evidence" of the war nurseries, evoked the dangers of separating mothers and children and claimed that the experiences of war had proved a vindication of the emotional health of unified family life.' (Riley, 1981: 109-10)

The examples from the questionnaire cited above clearly demonstrate women's

different experiences of 'work' and 'home' at this time, and the point has already been made that not all women automatically chose to continue working when they were apparently no longer needed. Yet these contradictory elements in themselves must be read against the facts that: despite the 'family wage'; despite the 'consumer boom' which was ushered in with the 1951 Conservative election victory; and in spite of the fact that some women wanted to occupy all roles - be married, be mothers, be workers - women were subjected to a proliferation of *ideas* about the nature of appropriate femininity, including maternity, in the early 1950s and subsequently.

In relation to Affluence it was the position of women within the 'classless society' which as Elizabeth Wilson has argued, provided the "touchstone for the social revolution, their situation was the paradigm of Britain's successful experiment in non-revolutionary democracy and gradualist approach to equality" (Wilson, 1980: 12). Where women were targeted by Affluence as 'consuming housewives' this created certain 'problems' since in order to consume, the consuming housewife became also the 'working housewife'. Yet the real contribution of women's employment, both to the economic achievements of the period and to the rise in household incomes, was constantly undermined: work was always seen as something women did for 'pin money' rather than something which essentially defined them (see Chapter 4 on the status of work in *Dance Hall*).

The years between 1945 and the early 1950s can be seen primarily as a time of

transition; the transition from Austerity to Affluence, from an emphasis on production to an emphasis on consumption, but also this period has been characterised as a time of equality, classlessness and consensus, notions that had their foundations in Welfarism.

The setting up of the Welfare State - a civil state that was constructed for the collective benefit and welfare of its citizens - which dominates the early part of this period and reverberates through the rest of it, is perhaps one of the most important markers of this time. As Elizabeth Wilson has pointed out, the Welfare State is not simply the policies of collective provision and security, it is also "the ideologies to which it alludes" (see Wilson, 1977: 12). Embodied in this is the notion of consensus and, importantly, 'classlessness'. This connects with the position of women in the 50s in so far as the policies of Welfarism contained within them particular conceptions and constructions of womanliness and in so far as ideas of classlessness and consensus also envisaged and alluded to particular sets of roles for women: once society was 'classless', all its members would be equally regarded, protected and provided for by the state, irrespective of their class. However, there was a more important blurring of boundaries contained within welfarism: a weakening of the idea of women as individual citizens, and if women were to be displaced from that position, socially and discursively, the question of their class position became almost irrelevant. The passing of the *National Insurance Act* in 1946 was instrumental in determining the position of women in the workforce in the new Welfare State; a position which was never identified as

equal (see Wilson, 1977: 150). Thus, a single working woman's national insurance was less than a man's because men, it was assumed, would be supporting a family. The *Act's* position on married women was that they were part of a team, subsumed by the category of husband/father, supported by him and dependent upon him. The very structures on which the Welfare State was founded rested upon a set of assumptions about women's dependency and domestic role which were heightened and supported by those aspects of the *Beveridge Report* that concentrated on anxieties about the falling birth-rate:

"The attitude of the housewife to gainful employment outside the home is not and should not be the same as that of the single woman. She has other duties...In the next thirty years housewives as Mothers have vital work to do in ensuring the adequate continuance of the British race and of British Ideals in the world." (*Beveridge Report*, 1942: 52.)

The imperialist and eugenicist thrust to much writing that appeared in both this *Report* and the 1949 *Royal Commission on Population* is relevant here in as much as it demonstrates a clear and unified moral framework within which the apparent population scare was articulated - a framework which retrospectively reveals much about the class underpinnings of concerns for the 'benefits' of a universal increase in family size. The argument could in other terms be defined as the privileging of 'quality' over 'quantity', the foregrounding of middle-class values and moral frameworks versus the vulgarity and fecundity of the working-classes.

"The interest of the State is not in getting children born, but in getting them born in conditions which secure to them the proper domestic environment and care." (*Beveridge Report*: 135)

What is important here, and what is evident in this short extract from the *Report*, is



that there was a clear intention to make motherhood a duty - for the good of the nation - and that there were 'proper' forms of motherhood. It is, nevertheless, important to acknowledge the limits of such pronouncements. No matter how much women may have been persuaded or cajoled into maternity; no matter how much the setting up of the Welfare State and the policies this entailed aimed to make motherhood attractive; no matter how much women's sense of moral duty was evoked and the idea of the needs of the nation was repeated, it is the case that whilst

'Pronatalist thinking generated a great deal of language about "the mother"...It filled bits of the world with sound while the birth rate crept quietly upwards...the ubiquity of this official nerviness about the falling population cannot in itself...be assumed to have affected women's reproductive behaviour one way or another. Rhetoric doesn't make women have more children through sheer power of the word.' (Riley, 1983: 150).

The initial flurry of family and 'free mothers'<sup>12</sup> literature which appeared in 1945-6 concentrated on the improvement of the social conditions and contexts of motherhood - nurseries, after school centres for children, family rail tickets and rest homes for tired mothers/housewives (Riley, 1983: 167). In addition, literature such as Eva Hubback's *The Population of Britain* (1947) argued for better access to medical services (gynaecology and obstetrics), marriage guidance services and improved sex education and 'household skills' courses in schools as well as the provision of such courses in adult education centres. Considered in the social-democratic context of the immediate post-war years it is possible to see such

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<sup>12</sup>'Free mothers' are those mothers 'freed' to return to the comfort of the home and family life, see Riley, 1983: 150-1

literature, in part at least, as a potentially progressive movement towards the recognition of the realities of the lives of many women and an expressed desire to improve those conditions. However, the position of women within these prescriptions and suggestions was such that 'women' were assumed to be 'mothers' also, to the extent that 'women', especially married women who worked, seemed often to disappear altogether; the 'sexless citizen' is subsumed by 'the mother' just as 'wives' were subsumed by 'husbands' in the *Beveridge Report*:

'...I would describe that particularly intense concentration on "the mother" which got going in 1945-6 as a symptom/indication of the impossibility of holding together, at the level of language, the unity of "the family", once the end of the war had dissolved its rhetorical appeal.' (Riley, 1981: 89)

Regardless of whether, in the end, the social democratic discourses of the immediate post-war years were progressive or not, by the early- to mid-1950s pronatalist rhetoric had entered a somewhat different phase. Based on both studies of war nurseries and the experiences of evacuees, the framework within which debates around women and work were discussed shifted, and attention began to focus on early mother-child relationships.

"The mother of young children is not free, or at least should not be free, to earn." (Bowlby, 1953: 105)

'I was fortunate enough to grow up in the optimism of the 50s, and to go to a girls' Grammar School. I was the first person ever in my family to receive any "proper" education beyond 14, and to go on to enter a profession. Even so, when I went to the Grammar School the head-mistress told my mother that "by educating a girl you educate a family", and for the vast majority of us it was expected that our main aim in life was marriage and motherhood, and that we had somehow failed if (like me) we did not marry until nearly 30!' (J. Austin)

The juxtaposition of these extracts functions to illustrate the divergences between

what was, by the mid-1950s, the predominant view on working mothers and the ways in which this impacted on young women's lives - the disjunction, if you like, between discourse and one woman's experience of the tensions between expectations, desire and ambition. J. Austin's recollections about the period reflect the way that girls' education stressed the primacy of domesticity, marriage and motherhood and recognised the centrality of 'properly' educated girls to the ideological imperatives of the time. As the BFHG have pointed out:

"...a series of assumptions about the lives of *most* women were used by writers on the education and training of girls to absorb any residue of tension between women's paid work and their domestic role. *Either* they assumed...that the woman would see her work as less important than the man's...or they assumed that women would want to and be able to work mainly in areas that reflected their domestic role or could be happily assimilated into them because of the low-level of commitment required." (BFHG, 1979: 52, emphasis in original. See 51-4 for a general discussion on the education of girls.)

The frameworks within which girls were educated in the 1950s reflected a more diffuse and wide-ranging set of discourses:

"Psychologists...urged women to return to or to remain in the home. The theme of latch-key children was taken up in the popular press and neglectful mothers, their values perverted by materialism and greed for more and more possessions were blamed for juvenile delinquency." (Wilson, 1977: 64)

The source of this particular position on the question of women and work/women and domesticity-motherhood lies in John Bowlby's 'maternal deprivation' theories, and as Wilson goes on the point out (*ibid.*: 64-5) these theories have been widely debated and attacked (on both political and theoretical grounds). Nevertheless, it was in the particular conjuncture of the 1950s - with the newly established Welfare

State and the formalised nature of welfare agencies - that these ideas gained a currency which had real effectivity across a range of social bodies.<sup>13</sup> (This had also been the case with the radio broadcasts of Donald Winnicott in the 1940s: see Riley, 1983: 88-90.)

“Ideologies about motherhood in the fifties need to be set in the context of the rapid growth of the child welfare movement on various fronts - to take one example, the work of the Curtis Committee in the immediate post-war period [1946] and the connections being made between juvenile delinquency and broken homes. This concern with the woman as mother was exclusive of her other roles. Unlike the writing on women’s work, which constantly recognises her other and primary role as mother, books on parentcraft assume a sexual division of labour where the father is the breadwinner...the writers on motherhood never question that to be a mother is what every woman wants and is her primary occupation.” (BFHG, 1979: 55)

There are echoes here of the previously cited shift to the idea of motherhood as ‘duty’ contained in the *Beveridge Report*. In her discussion of Bowlby, Wilson argues that this notion of the ‘duty’ of motherhood is simultaneous with the ‘duty of reproduction’ and thus, by extension incorporates a new emphasis on the ‘duty of pleasure’:

“Bowlby, like other psychoanalysts, has implied that in motherhood - and in no other role or relationship - pleasure principle and reality principle coincide, and that the mother’s duty of reproduction is simultaneously her highest pleasure and source of fulfilment...Women’s role in servicing the worker [and reproducing the labour force] was extended to the duty of welcoming and responding to his lovemaking.” (Wilson, 1977: 65-6)

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<sup>13</sup>Again, it is almost impossible to pinpoint the explicit address and influence of such pronouncements in a way that irrefutably established a concentrated and sustained attempt to coerce and persuade women, rather their modes of address and effectivity are to be discovered across a diffuse and diverse range of sources.

The shift from discourses of production that addressed women as workers and citizens to discourses of consumption that addressed women primarily as consumers was accompanied by a shift from notions of duty to notions of pleasure, even to the duty of pleasure as illustrated by the extracts from Winship's study of women's magazines (above, Chapter 2) and their emphasis on presentations of proper 50s femininity through investment in transforming both the home and the self. Moreover, as Wilson has pointed out, it was during this period that sexuality and sexual practices in marriage came under un-precedented scrutiny: the two Kinsey reports appeared in 1948 and 1953 and his findings were to create 'a much greater awareness of the nature and extent of sexual activity. He emphasised individual sexual "outlets" rather than a coherent sexual identity' (Wilson, 1980: 108). In spite of the evidence presented by Kinsey - some of which was seen undoubtedly as radical and threatening since it represented a challenge to dominant assumptions about, for instance, the male sex-drive and the 'duty' of wives to satisfy their husbands - the plethora of literature on sexual technique which appeared in the following years confined its prescriptions to the boundaries of marriage. It may be the case that increasing numbers of family planning clinics and the wider availability of contraception were one of the consequences of the 'art of marriage' movement and the relaxation of puritanical attitudes which accompanied it, but there were real differences in the ways working-class and middle-class women experienced their femininity and sexuality. (Wilson cites the findings of Elizabeth Bott as one example, see Wilson, 1980: 85.) Women in particular were

subjected to - and the subjects of - a multiplicity of discursive practices that can be seen as part of the post-war settlement, an attempt to resolve, at an ideological level, the upheavals caused by the war (see Hall, 1980: 21-5), but which can also be seen within the framework of Affluence: woman as nurturing and consuming, woman as sexual subject:

“The way women, including their sexuality, came to be constructed in this period was the outcome of the over-determination of these different practices of ideological representation, one on another, and the work of privileging and displacement, which is the effect of their articulation, one on another and with other practices.” (Hall, 1980b: 23-4)

It is here, in the operation of these three concomitant yet differently articulated and sited ‘duties’ - motherhood, pleasure and consumption - that the presentation of particular ideas about womanliness reached its most intense expression; above all through securing sexual activity, sexuality and, in particular, preferred forms of femininity within the family structure. Whilst this is not the main point at issue here, the association of motherhood with ‘proper’ forms of sexuality and femininity is central to the ideological positioning of women at this time.

Criticisms of Bowlby and the ideological and discursive effects of ‘maternal deprivation’ seem in no way to have lessened its effectivity and circulation.

However, it is the case that ‘Bowlbyism’ was one expression (albeit the most often cited) of a range of theories, influenced by psychoanalytic theory, which had found a new, apparently more urgent, articulation following the wartime experiences of families separated by evacuation (Wilson, 1977: 64). Riley also has outlined the development of ‘Bowlbyism’ as well as critiques of it (1983: 94-108) and

importantly, has argued that:

'The period in which Bowlby's work was being disseminated had already absorbed a large literature of the "problem family", a category well established before the war. Bowlby's WHO report [1952] fell on fertile ground: a simplified version of it was published in 1953, as *Child Care and the Growth of Love*: this ran into many editions and reprints and is the book above all responsible for defining the "Bowlbyism" of "keeping mothers in the home".' (Riley, 1983: 100)

It may not entirely be fair or accurate to attribute to one man the 'blame' for the particular emphasis placed on mothering in the 1950s, nevertheless, the tenor of *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) and subsequent writings did constitute an important element within a constellation of attitudes and conceptions about women as mothers. One of the central tenets of Bowlby's position (and the same is also true of other psychoanalytical or psychological writings of this time) is the importance of the mother/child dyad,<sup>14</sup> and it is this which was most effective (in combination with other social and ideological shifts) in shaping these newly accentuated perceptions about women's role and position in 1950s Britain. Whether as a recognition of the real absence of fathers from the family throughout W.W.II, or as part of a wider and more concerted effort to shape and influence women's ideas about their role as mothers, the figure of the father is displaced from any real, concrete position of power and influence within the process of

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<sup>14</sup>The centrality of the mother/child is a feature of the British School of psychoanalysis which developed from the Tavistock Institute. Whilst the specific details and emphasis of Bowlby may be different, his position was one which was reflected in the writings of Winnicott for example, and a wide range of psychologists and socio-psychologists. See Riley, 1983: 92-106 for a discussion of a range of authors whose work conforms to similar theoretical concerns and theses.

childrearing. Whilst fathers are seen to be essential in that they provide the money, security and the basic support structures necessary for the 'successful' rearing of children it is the mother who is placed at the centre of this process. Fathers may be workers in the public sphere but mothers are workers also:

'A mother's job is inevitably exacting, especially when her children are small. It is a craftsman's job and perhaps the most skilled in the world. But what worthwhile job is not exacting? Its reward for mothers is, Bowlby writes, the feeling "that they really matter, that no-one else will do".' (Riley, 1983: 101, Bowlby extract from *Can I Leave My Baby*, 1958)

The promise is of unalienated labour and the sentiments are an echo of the words of Eileen Wilkinson:

"...I have not yet found the woman who has interesting and responsible work who wants to give it up just to be a wife and mother in a small house." (cited from Riley, 1981: 81)

It would seem that the ideological work is complete: women have been successfully re-located. The 'tired and bored' working-class woman is provided with a 'safe haven' from the rigour and tedium of manual labour; the middle-class 'career woman' is given a solution to the dilemma of 'work' or 'motherhood'.

Womanliness and proper femininity are both neatly sutured into the new classlessness of the 1950s and the choice is no longer between 'wife and mother' or 'career woman' since the status of motherhood has been raised to essential, skilled work whilst, at the same time, secured more firmly within the hidden, private sphere of the home and family.

It has been argued that this shift, positioning women as the pivot of social reproduction, had positive effects although these have been unacknowledged



subsequently and even denied in the rush to illustrate the reactionary and stifling elements in such work - for instance the refusal of women's independence outside of the mother-child relationship, the over emphasis of the effects of maternal deprivation and the rejection of alternative structures of childcare. Rather, it has been suggested that there is a great deal of positive value to be found in

"Bowlby's insistence on the importance of the child's feelings and rights, for example, the importance of emotional care as well as physical care, and the status he gives mothers as vital members of the community. There was much in his own work and the work of his school which clearly appealed to women in the fifties, and it would be wrong to see the influence of Bowlbyism either as entirely negative or as foisted upon unwilling women by the dominant ideologues." (BFHG, 1979: 56. See also the same page for a similar argument about Winnicott's stress on the private world of the mother and child.)

Of course, it is necessary and important to recognise the limits of discourse, and to acknowledge the ways in which women recognised themselves in the appeals of pronatalist rhetoric; this reiterates previous points that have stressed the tension between women's experiences of the period, the stories we have received about them and their lives, and women's own desires, ambitions and attitudes. The contradictions in these have already been pointed out with respect to a brief selection of questionnaire extracts; one further extract serves to underline the effectivity and appeal of the new status and primacy given to women as mothers:

"We grew up [in the early 1950s] expecting that our role as wives and mothers was to be feminine and cherished and generally cared for." (E. Milne)

Yet, despite the ideological work of the 1950s - affluence and classlessness (both of which were experienced as real, lived conditions at some level) - women were

not successfully gathered into the seamless web of women = motherhood above all else. At the beginning of this chapter it was made clear that increasing numbers of women worked outside of the home throughout the period. In the immediate post-war period this employment was related to the need to revive manufacturing industry that had suffered during the war and the need to reconstruct Britain's industrial base and, more literally, to restore a sense of 'home' and 'community' that had been disrupted and devastated by the war. However, the need for women workers was tempered by a perceived need to reconstitute 'the family' and to promote motherhood in order to avert a projected population crisis. The patterns of women's work established in the immediate post-war years laid the foundation for the next decades; in the 1950s in particular, women workers were no longer necessary for economic and social growth but were redirected towards a duty to prescribed forms of motherhood - any employment was for 'pin-money', a notion supported by the newly established universal benefits provided by the Welfare State, the family wage and the idea of the classless society in which all members were equally treated regardless of class (but not gender) and notwithstanding, of course, the inherent class bias behind Welfarism.

Thus, we can begin to see a clearer picture of the particularities of the construction of 'appropriate womanliness' throughout the period. These two contextualising chapters provide the basis for discussion to shift from the social to the cultural arena, and in the following chapters I shall discuss how these presentations of womanliness achieved cultural expression in selected British films from the time

(Chapters 4 and 6) and in critical writing about the female cinema audience  
(Chapter 5).

## CHAPTER FOUR: Imaging Femininity - Class and Consumption

“Laura [in *Brief Encounter*] is part of the general British cinematic attempt to define not only moral and social codes, but also the national cinema style, through the image of woman. Woman [in British Cinema] could represent both past ways and values, in the traditional role of the mother, but also change and new values, in the mobile woman and sexual mother.” (Lant, 1991: 192)

For Antonia Lant, the figure of Laura Jeesson in *Brief Encounter* (1945) signifies the tension in representations of women in British films in the immediate post-war period, focused on ‘traditional’ notions of femininity, domesticity and motherhood and a ‘new’ notion of womanliness.<sup>1</sup> This ‘new’ womanliness grew out of women’s

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<sup>1</sup>*Brief Encounter* and the figure of Laura Jeesson occupy an important, but not central, place in this project. The setting of *Brief Encounter* in a pre-war Britain of relative social cohesion and security is in contrast to its moment of exhibition in an immediate post-war Britain, and this raises some points about its status as a film of ‘Austerity’. However, as Lant suggests:

‘...the film negotiates the war’s legacy for concepts of femininity through an intricate temporal lattice. Its diegesis is fastened both to that “so-called peace and civilization” of the winter before the outbreak of war and to the time of the audience’s present, that is, 1945. But the film raises social and aesthetic issues...germane to the wartime and immediately postwar home front...The combination invites the audience to experience nostalgia, distance, and recognition, and even, for some, alienation...the film summons up the routine rhythms of cinematic realism alongside the timelessness of film fantasy, which contributes to the displacement of the historical dilemma of mothers onto myths and memories. *Brief Encounter* could produce no single, stable temporal point for the investigation of a mother’s desire, certainly not the point of 1945; it could, however, air the problem by turning to the prewar world.’ (Lant, 1991: 158-9)

Thus, *Brief Encounter* presents a middle-class femininity that is both nostalgic and contemporaneous: Laura Jeesson may be a pre-war figure, but the tensions she has to negotiate in terms of sexual desire versus domesticity, for instance, are very much ones faced by women in 1945.

wartime roles carried over into the post-war years through their continued activity in paid employment but also, more importantly, derived from the association of women in particular with the new post-war society of progress and modernity. In previous chapters I have shown how women were central to the re-constructive project of post-war Britain and were addressed by Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation in ways that placed them in particular positions in relation to work, the home and consumption. There were, nevertheless, contradictions and tensions between the feminine subject positions on offer, most notably between

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The status of *Brief Encounter* in this project is as a sort of reference point: the immediate post-war years are vital if we are to understand how and in what ways certain models of femininity were presented (as was discussed in the previous Chapter). Yet, the focus of discussion of films in this Chapter primarily attends to films exhibited in the early- to mid-1950s. This potential difficulty can be addressed through clarifying that the significance of the films' representations of femininity is understood as being tied to particular transitional moments in post-war Britain that exemplify identifiable shifts and discontinuities in the presentation of femininity which are, in turn, attached to identifiable moments of transition in the wider culture. Where some consideration of *Brief Encounter* is vital in this respect - especially in terms of its status in British Cinematic history, with reference both to its construction within 'Quality Film' discourses and its presentation of an enduring image of a peculiarly British middle-class femininity (see Chapter 6 where this is discussed in relation to the image of Diana Dors in *Yield to the Night*) - it is also the case that the film has a somewhat ambiguous position here. The figure of Laura Jeesson may not be as 'present' in this text as might be expected, nevertheless hers is an image that informs the following analyses: she is compared to both Amy in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and Mary in *Yield to the Night*; whilst the middle-class femininity of Monica in *Turn the Key Softly* somehow echoes the middle-class femininity represented in *Brief Encounter*. As an enduring and powerful image Laura Jeesson is hard to ignore and the movement between Laura Jeesson and Mary Hilton was, in a sense, another 'riddle' that motivated aspects of this project. The image of Celia Johnson may be, then, something of a ghostly presence, but the 'appropriate' middle-class womanliness she represents is vital to thinking about the femininities discussed here (the implication of this image, and the assumption of familiarity with it, is also an assumption of familiarity with its place in the story of British Cinematic history).

representations that privileged woman as worker and citizen versus woman as mother and later as consumer. Here I want to show how these tensions were worked through in selected films from the period, in order to demonstrate that representations of women in British films offered limited (but also conflicting) strategies for the exploration of desires and ambitions other than those in accordance with dominant notions of women's role and place in post-war Britain. Indeed, I would argue that the femininities represented were contained within a rigid hierarchy of notions of appropriate feminine behaviour and presentation and were deeply rooted in the construction of class identities; certain class specific notions of femininity and sexuality were key elements in British films and these played upon ideas of women as unreliable, subject to both the lures of glamour and to the 'pernicious' influence of Americanisation with its attendant 'threat' to preferred notions of Britishness.

In order to demonstrate this I will discuss the following films: *Dance Hall* (1950), *Turn the Key Softly* (1953), *Brief Encounter* (1945) and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957). First I will discuss *Dance Hall* in order to show the ways that women were presented in relation to patterns of work and leisure in what can be called an 'austere landscape' - a working-class milieu in which female characters struggle to achieve a place between the imaginative space offered by the dance hall and its attendant dreams of Affluence and Americanisation, and the material boundaries of Austerity and tradition that restricted the realisation of ambition and desire.

*Turn the Key Softly* will be discussed in relation to the ways that femininity is structured with respect to particular class identities that are founded on notions of both appropriate feminine behaviour and proper forms of consumption. In this film, a newly emerging aspirant working-class femininity has to negotiate a place in the modern, consumer society of early 1950s Britain that can contain both notions of continuity and tradition and changing social and class relations. Here we see the presentation of an uneasy alliance between 'traditional' middle-class femininity and a 'controlled' aspirant working-class femininity that reflects wider social and cultural notions of women's relationship to Affluence.

Finally, discussion focuses on *Woman in a Dressing Gown*. At the start of this section, I draw parallels between this film and *Brief Encounter* in order to show how two films from either end of the period that are loosely structured around the same theme - adultery - illustrate shifts in the possibilities for 'escape' for femininity. Where *Brief Encounter* deals with notions of desire and fantasy, and the exploration of a middle-class femininity that is at least presented with imaginative or fantastical alternatives, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* offers no parallel possibilities. Rather, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* presents a hopelessly confused and 'trapped' image of a femininity that is utterly bounded by the constraints of class and 'tradition'. The shift in focus across different classes in these two films is important since, as I have outlined above (Chapters 2 and 3), it was working-class femininity that was subjected to most pressure in terms of attempts to restructure womanliness in relation to new patterns of consumption. In

Illustration 8





*Woman in a Dressing Gown* we see the failure of a femininity that struggles to adapt to either the new identity of consumer citizen or a femininity that is structured by quite precise notions of appropriate feminine behaviour and presentation.

The films discussed in this chapter were all contained on the questionnaire and some comments from this are included. As I stated in Chapter 1, these films reflect a realist tradition in British Cinema and they were chosen for discussion because of this; *Woman in a Dressing Gown* was widely remembered by questionnaire respondents, as was *Brief Encounter*. However, *Dance Hall* and *Turn the Key Softly* did not elicit many responses and so these do not figure so much in discussion of those films; reasons for their inclusion were more influenced by a consideration of how they exemplify certain dominant themes that have emerged in this research, namely the relationship between femininity, modernity and consumption, than by their status as widely remembered by the questionnaire respondents. Thus, the issue of audience response is not at the forefront of discussion of all the films in this chapter, rather I am interested to demonstrate how the issues already identified are exemplified in the presentation of womanliness in certain films and the ways these can be seen to reflect dominant constructions of femininity at this time.

### **Let's dance, I haven't danced for ages**

Released in 1950 *Dance Hall* clearly evokes Austerity, represents a working-class

femininity that closely allies women (and femininity and sexuality) to patterns of work and leisure, and focuses on these in a way that opens a space within which the relation of women to and within consumerism is expressed and explored. As with *Millions Like Us* (1943), *Dance Hall* at times uses a quasi-documentary style to align itself with a war-induced female workforce<sup>2</sup>. However, whereas *Millions Like Us* seeks to smooth over the contradictions raised by women's new, if 'temporary', gender roles *Dance Hall* offers up an invitation to inhabit a new space that promises not a return to pre-war containment, but a differently emphasised, relatively autonomous role, as consumer rather than as producer.

This 'invitation' is established in the opening sequence of the film which, although it lasts for less than two minutes, is important in two respects. First, in terms of how the audience is positioned and given information about the film and the characters in it: the opening sequence reveals so much about the characters that we instantly 'know' them and can 'place' them in terms of class, age, sexuality. (We know, for instance, from the bored, almost contemptuous expression on her face as she stands at her factory machine, that Diana Dors (Carole) is the 'good time girl')

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<sup>2</sup>It is through the use of documentary techniques such as the use of authentic locations and the focus on realistic situations and events that *Dance Hall* can be associated with the dominant British cinematic tradition of documentary realism. In terms of its subject matter and cinematic style *Dance Hall* is allied to *Penguin Film Review's* notion of the 'quality film' (see Chapter 5). The overlay of this documentary style onto the themes of the film (working-class women at work and at leisure) also condenses and makes more acute the austere feeling of the film. See Sue Aspinall, 1983: 280 for a discussion of the realistic mode and documentary roots of *Millions Like Us*, and 284, for an analysis of its domestic resolution for women.

Illustration 9



of the four, and that Jane Hylton (Mary) is the quiet, thoughtful, 'respectable' working-class girl.) Secondly, this opening sequence places the women within the three environments that are central to their lives and to the lives of many other young women from a similar class position: the workplace; the cramped and crowded home in which they live; and the local dance hall, the Chiswick Palais. These three environments are the focal points of the film, it is in the characters' relationships to them and their presentation in them that the film constructs particular meanings around work and domesticity, consumption and Americanisation.

*Dance Hall* is not particularly unusual in respect of the way it uses the first minutes of the film to provide information like this, however what is striking about it is not its content but the way that this opening sequence of shots represents a condensation of meanings about 'womanliness' in Britain in the late-1940s and early-1950s, so much so that it seems as if it lasts for far longer than in fact it does. Thus, patterns of identification are established almost immediately and these are important to help make sense of the meanings women may have gained from the film and its audience. Responses from women audience members attest to the ways that *Dance Hall* was seen to be grounded in the networks of real life, such that patterns of identification and familiarity were established with ease:

"I liked this film, it was so true to life. We all visited dance Halls, spent so many evenings at our local dance Halls during this period and could associate with it." (M. Pay)

"As I was just entering my ballroom dancing phase this was another film

with which I could identify and I envied the girls their pretty clothes and nice figures.” (W. Crichley)

“...I enjoyed the Ted Heath band...I used to go dancing. I identified.” (A. Robson)

“Again my life seemed like this as dancing was something I enjoyed.” (D. Golubovas)

This brief selection reflects the majority of responses to this film, most of which talk of *Dance Hall* in these terms. The clear connections these women make between *Dance Hall* and their own lives lends some weight to the arguments presented above that film is embedded in its historical moment in ways that place women in particular relations to leisure and consumption through the presentation of femininity. Although these comments go some way to support the suggestion that *Dance Hall* is a film which provides a space within which to partake of Affluence and even Americanisation (glamour, the expression of a femininity and sexuality which is outside of the spaces and forms contained in some other films of this time), negative comments on the film also support the suggestion that *Dance Hall* was simultaneously seen as a film that captured the ‘tenor’ of Austerity:

‘...I didn’t like it, I expect by then I thought I was a bit above the “factory girl” subjects.’ (J. Astell)

“Seedy...balked at films that looked like home.” (M. Sullivan)

Whilst it is not possible to present any conclusive arguments about the reception of *Dance Hall* in the light of such comments, they do convey a sense that the film had a resonance across a range of registers and in relation to a range of life-experiences, in addition to its subject matter. It is possible to attribute this to the cinematic

techniques used in the film.

The stylistic and filmic techniques used in *Dance Hall* depend on the codes and style of documentary film: the film is local and 'organic'; the women wear little or no make-up; the soundtrack buzzes with noise whether from the factory machinery, or in the bustle of crowded homes and the overwhelming volume of the big-band music in the dance hall. Parallels across *Dance Hall* and *Millions Like Us* have already been mentioned; these are identifiable in terms of cinematic style as well as in terms of subject matter and narrative, and it is this combination of elements which makes *Dance Hall* important to this discussion. The way that the film signifies class in relation to femininity and sexuality, how these are situated within and against both Austerity and (glimpses of) Affluence and, central in this film, how the theme of Americanisation is invoked to represent a 'threat' to the stability and continuity of 'normal' working-class femininity.

These elements are signified repeatedly in the three places (physical and psychic) the women occupy, and all are clearly marked in the first two minutes of the film. First, the factory (Illustration 8), with its heavy plant machinery, the women all in overalls and headscarves, the oily rags on which they wipe their hands, the cigarettes they smoke, the noise of both machines and women singing, the blare of the siren at the end of the shift; all of these recall images of women as wartime workers and hence, as patriotic producers significantly represented in terms of 'woman as worker' and notions of woman's place in post-war national re-

Illustration 10



construction (see Chapter 3). However, as they are always set against the other two spaces in which we see the characters (the home and the dance hall) these scenes also place the women more centrally in relations of consumption: they are represented as 'modern' women who work in order to be able to play and who are engaged in processes of 'self re-constitution'. This is made clear through the fact that there are no long sequences in the factory; whenever we see the women at work they are always just coming to the end of their shift, talking about the evening ahead or the weekend; making plans and discussing their preparations in anticipation of their leisure-time. Thus, the factory is not an arena that provides meaning in their lives, these characters are not defined primarily as workers, nor do they define themselves as such, rather work is a means whereby they can gain access to pleasure and enjoyment.

Secondly, the home - the private world against which the factory scenes are nearly always set - is the space in which (and against which) the transformation of worker to consumer takes place. These homes are not fully 'private' places since bedrooms are always shared and siblings are always present, fathers are shadowy figures behind evening newspapers and mothers occupy the traditionally female roles of housewife - making dinner, clearing up or ironing. The home is a site of contradictions for the female characters in *Dance Hall*: Eve (Natasha Parry), Mary (Jane Hylton), Georgie (Petula Clark) and Carole (Diana Dors) aspire to marriage and domesticity, but they do not want to 'be like' their mothers, constantly struggling to maintain order in over-crowded homes. For these women, the home,



marriage, domestication function as an idealised image, the move from daughter to wife is represented as a move away from the world of drudgery that their mothers inhabit into a world in which everything will be organised, clean and modern. The 'prison' of the parental home and 'traditional' domesticity is signified in a scene in Eve's bedroom where the close proximity of siblings and the appearance of bars on the window all convey a claustrophobic atmosphere. Later, when she has a 'home of her own', she too is trapped: the flat is dark, as she ties her apron strings she tries to conform to the domestic role she always wanted but she fails; she breaks things, knocks things over. It is only the distant strains of Big Band music that transport her away from the restraints of home life into a world of fantasy.

Illustration 9 is a still from *Dance Hall* that shows the scene in another bedroom, this time Carole's. It is representative of both the clutter and disarray of the domestic world that the women and their families inhabit, and the transformation from worker to consumer that is undertaken in them. The image is interesting because it represents the presence of both Austerity and Affluence (and an attendant Americanisation) simultaneously. The dressing-table at which Carole sits is littered with the containers, bottles and equipment that a modern young woman needs: face creams, lotions and powders, a block of mascara, a pair of eyebrow tweezers, talcum powder, lip cream, hairbrushes and a hand mirror. There are also ornaments and photographs on the table top and one, prized, framed, photograph that we cannot quite make out. On the wall behind the mirror are various publicity stills of male stars, and behind Carole is a record player. All of these items signify

aspects of a modern femininity and in *Dance Hall* the home is an important space for representing the contradictions embodied in femininity for these women. It is a private place which acts as a bridge between the two public spaces in which the characters spend the rest of their time, yet it offers no real possibility for privacy or intimacy - Carole's sister stands sullenly in the corner of the room, and in other scenes younger brothers or sisters are sprawled on the sitting-room floor, or in the bedroom, watching Eve's get ready for the evening out. 'A home' is what Eve, Mary and Carole want, it is a place of their own, physically and psychically, a space in which they can *become* wives, mothers, domesticated, but it is also the place in which we see the reality of women's domesticity - thus, it represents a disjunction between what the women desire and what they will most likely get: cramped living spaces in which they exercise only nominal control and which trap them to some extent. Eve's experience of domestic life for instance, only works to highlight this gap between desire and reality since when she gets what she thought she wanted it turns out to be not what she imagined at all. Finally, this private space signifies one more contradiction and problem: the homes we see in *Dance Hall* are working-class (functional but not necessarily comfortable, untidy but not chaotic, 'private' but not intimate); the home acts as a transitional space between work and leisure and as such it does contain 'free' spaces, or imaginative possibilities, yet the home also represents an Austerity that is both real, materially experienced, and imaginary, containing and limiting fantasy.

The still from Carole's room demonstrates clearly all of these contradictions and

lays over the top of them a significant, further meaning. This resides in the gap between Carole's pose, her wistful expression and the mirror that she looks towards, but in which we can see no reflection. The publicity stills on the wall, the gramophone, the accoutrements of 'glamour' that litter the dressing-table's surfaces, the photographs stuck around the edge of the mirror (one of them just identifiable as a glamour image cut out from a magazine) stand in for another world; a world of Affluence, plenty and allure. Carole, her preparations complete, is a glamorous figure about to embark on an evening of fun, excitement and intimacy at the dance-hall, checking her appearance with a sidelong glance at the mirror. It might reasonably be expected that the audience would share her appraisal of herself, that we, too, would look at her in the mirror. Yet we see nothing reflected in the mirror; a traditional trope for representing the vanity and duplicity of women is here refused not, I would argue, because Carole is no such woman (all other information about her suggests otherwise: that she is seduced by glamour and is somewhat vain), but because the film ultimately closes down the possibility of entering a world of Affluence and the allure of American culture. The positioning of the film stills and photographs behind and around the mirror clearly suggests the association between appearance and the transformation from Austerity Britain to Affluent and seductive America, but the possibility of transformation is denied because the reflection of the woman is not there - and even if it was, the mirror is covered with a film of dust which would obscure and distort the image, or even render it unrecognisable. Affluence and the lure of Americanisation is thus

Illustration 11



Illustration 12



YVONNE MITCHELL • KATHLEEN HARRISON  
AND JOAN COLLINS IN

Turn The Key Softly<sup>TM</sup>



presented as empty; it may be seductive but, like candy-floss, when you get it, when the imagination manifests itself, it is insubstantial and unfulfilling - a cheat, a chimera. The refusal of fantasy and possible 'escape' represented in this still image is re-worked throughout the film in relation to the dance-hall and the constant rehearsal of frustration and 'failure' that takes place within it.

It is the Chiswick Palais (Illustration 10) that constitutes the third and final space in *Dance Hall*. Constantly juxtaposed against the workplace and the home (which in their own ways, operate as spaces that both confine and enable the women) the dance hall also acts as a space of fantasy and denial, and a place in which the contradictions of femininity in late-40s and early-50s Britain are represented and negotiated. It is here that the women want to be, it is here that they can *be themselves* and it is here that they are exposed to, and seduced by, the glitter and spectacle of another world or way of life that is desirable but unknown to them in their everyday lives. The dance hall acts as a place of excitement and fantasy; from the grandeur of the Palais décor (the columns, sweeping staircases, lights, the balcony) to its inhabitants (men in bow ties who are smart, suave, polite and protective, even paternal, as the manager arranges for Georgie to have a 'real' ballroom dancing gown for the competition), to the thrill and abandonment of dancing ('I want to dance', says Eve; 'I want to go now', replies Phil (Donald Houston), her husband; 'ladies, ladies, come out of that jungle' urges the manager to two young women who are jiving). The dance hall is a space in which the forced closeness of council flats where too many people live in a too small space, is

transformed into a space where intimacy is thrilling, desired and legitimated, where 'the last waltz' may fulfill dreams of romantic love with a dashing stranger. The dance hall is also a space in which these women enter into new patterns of consumption. The desire to escape from a world which is bounded by 'austerity' is tempered by another boundedness: the lack of means ever to escape it fully. This is most poignantly articulated when Georgie's parents come to watch her dance in the competition; she is not wearing the dress they made sacrifices to give her and they try to leave before she notices their presence. Georgie's guilt at 'betraying' her parents is also that precipitated by her attempt to replace her working-class reality and its values with the fantasy offered by Affluence.

The evocation of America - as both a seductive and threatening force to established Britishness and as a sign of aspiration and consuming power - is a central feature of the cultural formation of the immediate post war period (see Chapter 2). In *Dance Hall* the danger and promise of Americanness is located in the Palais itself; with its promise of riches and success (symbolised by both the prize money for the dancing competition, and the imaginative space that the dance hall embodies and signifies); and by the presence of an Americanised male figure: Bonar Colleano as Alec. It is through the figure of Alec, a spiky and angular man unconcerned and detached from the human dramas which surround him and which he precipitates, that the glamour, insincerity, gloss and ultimately unfulfilling nature of Americanisation reveals itself. Alec owns his own flat, has an open-top sports car and the latest Benny Goodman record and he shakes his cigarettes out of the packet. This is

perhaps a small detail, yet it signifies an exotic otherness in a way that is highly charged and reminiscent of the allure, as well as the perceived danger of the presence of U.S. servicemen stationed in Britain during wartime. As discussed in Chapter 2, the presence of G.I.'s in Britain even after the War, was a focus of resentment and difficulties around 'proper' behaviour and attitudes. Alec is in a sense doubly signified as other and 'dangerous' because he is also an almost perfect sign of a culture which is composed of migrants, strangers, cosmopolitans; a culture with no 'real history', no 'taste' and no 'value'. Finally, and crucially, he is Eve's dancing partner for the competition - Phil can neither dance nor does he want to, and Alec had previously been his rival for Eve's affection. When Eve, already married to Phil, visits Alec in his flat, the empty promise of Americanisation is echoed by the words of a song Hy Hazel is singing (the same song she also sings at the Palais): 'You're only dreaming...What a fool you are...Why won't you understand, fairyland won't do...'. While Phil and Eve exist in a world where tins of food and steak are all 'on points', Alec has more than enough food, but it is useless (he has a flat full of Scottish kippers that he cannot consume himself, nor can he give them away). When Alec tries to seduce Eve for a second time she refuses, recognising and admitting the 'emptiness' of the event, telling him of the meaninglessness of their first encounter. Similarly, Georgie does not dance well with Peter because she has fallen for the fantasy of the borrowed dress ('It's just like stepping into a cloud') over the more mundane virtues of the dress (plain and 'straight') that her parents gave her. Alec's last words in the film: 'I



used to thank my lucky stars that I didn't care about anybody; now I know that nobody cares about me,' express the dichotomy and impossibility of the 'American dream' in post-war Britain: it may be a fantasy, it may be desired but ultimately, it is empty. It is the authentic world of Austerity Britain that is the only possibility for the women of *Dance Hall* however much it is a life of hardship and even if they are in the end made to "stay at home and be bored, bored, bored!"

The limitations for femininity that *Dance Hall* ultimately represents are linked to the working-classness of the female characters such that there can be no misapprehension of the imposition of material reality and the discursive pressures on the imaginative and alternative spaces they carve out for themselves. In *Dance Hall*, the frustration and disillusionment of the struggles to achieve womanliness are tangible and painful.

This is not simply accountable for in terms of class and the exclusion of working-class women from affluent patterns of consumption. I would argue that it is also related to shifts in the ways that womanliness was produced through discursive activity - this is evident in the next film I want to discuss, *Turn the Key Softly*. In *Dance Hall* we can see attempts to re-construct femininity according to a newly established post-war order, and an exploration of this femininity that is articulated in relation to the tensions between Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation. I would argue that throughout the period 1945-58, the presentation of a contained and limited femininity is constant, what changes and is

accentuated differently is the ways in which this containment is achieved, and that this is in turn understandable by linking the 'work' of the films to both the material conditions of the period and the ways that women are structured into Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation. Where *Dance Hall* insist on the discontinuity between the desire for change as expressed through the desire of the female characters for glamour and the space to express a femininity and sexuality predicated on 'glamorous consumption', *Turn the Key Softly* focuses on the adjustment of femininity to 'correct' forms of consumption that can contain desire and discursive construction at the same time.

**Are those real pearls? They're not very big are they, I like my jewellery to be noticed.**

*Turn the Key Softly* begins with a scene of transformation when, about to be released from prison, the three female characters remodel themselves from shapeless, amorphous and unrecognisable figures into fully differentiated and separate women, distinct and individuated (see illustrations 11 and 12).

The three main characters in *Turn the Key Softly* have all been in prison for various crimes - Monica (Yvonne Mitchell) for burglary,<sup>3</sup> Stella (Joan Collins) for

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<sup>3</sup>It is coincidental that Yvonne Mitchell appears in three of the films discussed here (*Turn the Key Softly*, *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, and *Yield to the Night*), nevertheless some attention should be given to this and I would, therefore, like to make a few tentative remarks about the 'image' of Yvonne Mitchell. From the questionnaire responses, Yvonne Mitchell was perceived overwhelmingly a 'an actress', not as 'a star': 'A really good actress, never a "star" as such - usually in serious, intelligent roles' (J. Murby); "A quiet, determined actress, don't remember

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any news items about her" (S. Darby); 'A good actress but not one of my favourites. Not glamorous enough I suppose. Never liked her films, not "frothy" enough' (B. Everett); "Wonderful actress...she was recognised as such but she never appeared in magazines: she wasn't a pin-up" (J. Gien).

This perception of Mitchell as a 'serious actress' is supported by various 'profiles' of her from a range of different publications, for instance from *Picturegoer* (August 13, 1949 and June 5, 1954), *Picture Show* (13 October, 1956), and from the *Sunday Times* (14 August, 1960). This reading of Yvonne Mitchell, in terms of characteristics associated with stage rather than movie acting, is relevant to understanding her image and, in one sense, places her image closer to those which dominated 1940s, rather than 1950s, British Cinema. She is seen to be somehow outside of the glamour that signifies 'stardom', but this also allows her to be accorded a respect which places her on a parallel with the 'serious' actresses of British films like Celia Johnson, Deborah Kerr or Anna Neagle - like them, she is 'placed' or understood in terms of her performance rather than appearance. Further comments from the questionnaires suggest that she is notable as an 'actress', not as a 'star' (to which other criteria apply). Thus, she was either unmemorable - "Who's she?" (M. Fairhurst) - or not easily recognisable in particular roles or personae - "Never achieved stardom, but gave some good character performances, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and *Black Narcissus* notably" (J. Farbus). This mis-recognition of Yvonne Mitchell in *Black Narcissus* (confused with Kathleen Byron), suggests that there is a sort of 'indeterminacy' about Yvonne Mitchell's image that precludes her from the instant recognisability of 'stardom'. Whilst this is, in itself, one of the perceived strengths of Mitchell as 'an actress', certain ambiguities also surround the roles she plays in the films discussed here and may offer another clue to her problematic image in terms of 'stardom': for instance, she is a refined, middle-class woman in *Turn the Key Softly*; a chaotic and 'hopeless' upper-working-/lower-middle-class housewife in *Woman in a Dressing Gown*; an efficient and sympathetic but somehow 'unwomanly' woman in *Yield to the Night*. In this way, her persona is not easily identifiable, but at the same time, she is always somehow 'the same'. Clearly, the roles she plays in the films discussed in this project are important in terms of my analysis of 'appropriate' femininity and womanliness and although detailed consideration of Yvonne Mitchell (image and persona) is outside of the immediate concerns of this project, her image in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* is important. I would refer to my Conclusion where Mitchell's image in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* is discussed briefly with respect to the concept of the abject, and how this may provide a way of conceptualising the particular femininity she represents in that film. The nature of comments about her both in the questionnaires and other writing, both of which reveal a 'difficulty' with her, suggest that this may be a productive avenue of investigation - particularly if we take into account subsequent roles such as the one she plays in *Sapphire* (1959) where the tensions present in a femininity that is rent

soliciting, and Quilliam (Kathleen Harrison) for shoplifting - and the scenario of the film contrives to equate the crimes they have committed and the particular class position of each character. Thus, Monica represents the good, solid middle-class woman led astray by a corrupt and bored middle-class man (she was his look-out on a failed burglary, arrested when he abandoned her); Stella represents a disreputable working-class, seduced by money, glamour and excitement into a life of prostitution; and Quilliam represents an honest, 'respectable' working-classness, forced into a life of petty crime through poverty. Aspinall writes of these representations as stereotypical and naively simplistic in such a way as to reduce the characters to comic figures (1983: 289). While these images certainly are reductive, I would argue that this is due rather to the way that meanings attached to class and femininity are condensed into the three figures. This, I believe, makes their images over-determined, almost over-burdened with meaning, such that they represent an early-1950s classed femininity, rather than comic figures.

The opening scene of *Turn the Key Softly* echoes the first scenes of *Dance Hall* since in both films the female characters are seen to be 'transforming' themselves - from worker to consumer; from prisoner to free, autonomous woman. Yet the

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by frustration, jealousy and guilt, prove too much to contain. It may be possible to argue that Yvonne Mitchell is an abject figure for British Cinema at this time - an actress who's diversity and 'accomplishment' beffitted her for many roles, but who somehow problematises each of them. This, however, is a later project.

Illustration 13



assumption of identity in *Turn the Key Softly* is more of an obvious struggle for Monica, Stella and Quilliam than it is for the characters of *Dance Hall*. The earlier film does offer the opportunity for escape or fantasy even though it may in the end close off the possibility for real, material change, but in *Turn the Key Softly* the potential for an imaginative transformation is never a real possibility. Although the characters are relieved to be able to 'become' themselves again after a period of anonymity and sameness, once they have achieved this, once they have reconstructed their former selves, there is little room for manoeuvre within their given identities. The narrative thrust of the film is concerned with making minor adjustments to the women's characters so that they more appropriately act out their roles; in this way *Turn the Key Softly* explores the correct or proper expression of femininity rather than offering any alternative femininities, whether imagined or real. It is my contention that this is the ideological project of the film and that as a result of this, the assumption of femininity in *Turn the Key Softly* is more damaging (in that the characters have to sacrifice more of their desires), and more restrictive than it is in *Dance Hall* where the women negotiate their roles rather than *have to* 'fit into' them.

Monica, Stella and Quilliam re-assume their identities after a period during which they have been lost; in prison, hidden from the outside world and from men, their identities as women have been imposed upon them by a bureaucratic and state sanctioned system in which woman is a single, unified, damned and condemned subjectivity - a failed femininity that has been put to 'improper' use and that needs



to be re-modelled, made acceptable.

In illustration 11 we can see the rough-proofs of femininities that are yet to be made over, made appropriate. The signs of the characters' identities are detectible but not yet made manifest. Monica is formal, 'proper', aloof from the exchange between the other two women, her bearing is that of a proud woman who is sure of herself; Stella is defiant, and arrogant, her dismissive glance across to Quilliam establishes that she is ashamed of the older woman and will simply tolerate her no more; Quilliam is dishevelled and is the least sure of the three, where the other two women have their feet firmly planted on the concrete floor in a pose that reflects some sense of surety, Quilliam's posture hints at a timidity and a fearfulness that undermines her senior position and her longer, more established experience of life (and prison). This image establishes the foundations of the women's individual identities and their relationship to one another. In the scene which follows, the women dress themselves in their own clothes (although Quilliam offers to help Monica prepare, which further underpins her servile position) and, as they emerge from their cubicles, the 'true' differences between them become clear.

When we see the characters for the first time in their own clothes, the femininities that were previously only hinted at become explicit. Quilliam looks like a woman from pre-war, depressed Britain; her coat is heavy, creased and unfashionable, the wisps of hair escaping from beneath her out-dated and crumpled hat give her a neglected air, as do her thick, wrinkled stockings. Monica's clothes are tailored

from good quality cloth, she is smart, elegant and refined. Stella is every inch a fashionable, aspirant woman; her clothes accentuate a readily available sexuality, her ostentatious jewellery (bangles, necklace, brooch), high-heeled shoes, gloves, handbag and make-up combine to produce an image of femininity that is predicated on display. Here, in the opening sequence of the film, femininity is expressed through appearance and is linked to class and sexuality; womanliness is firmly linked to relations of consumption which are, in turn, signified through the outward signs of sexuality.

Throughout the transformation scene and as the women move towards the gate of the prison (illustration 12), both the relations between them and their place in the world as individuals is made more clear: Stella rushes towards the open gate but she loses her nerve, she hesitates and cannot make the step, either to freedom or into the 'proper' femininity that she believes she is about to enter (she is to be married). It is Monica, reserved but secure and self assured in her role who in the end must lead the way. Mrs. Quilliam follows behind Monica; admiring one woman, despairing of the other, and knowing that her own place is where it has always been - last, at the bottom. Thus, this film presents us with three models of femininity and the construction of a tripartite expression of womanliness. Quilliam, an old woman, a cypher for an old, outmoded and outdated working-class is a subservient figure who recognises her place, accepts it and, in a sense, refuses modernity and the call of Affluence. Monica, a signifier of the 'traditional' middle-class is also aware of her place in the social scale, and accepts it. But



Illustration 14



whereas Quilliam is bowed under the weight of her social status and her working-classness is unescapable, a burden, Monica assumes her role with a knowingness, a self-composed assurance; she is dignified, refined and discrete. Stella occupies a newly determined position, that of the aspirant, modernised, working-class woman who aspires to Monica's sureness of her place in the world and who despises the compliance of Quilliam.

These characteristics of class are not only signified in the women's attitudes and their unspoken recognition of their relationship to one another in terms of their social status, but also and in such a way as to make sure that we cannot mistake it, through their appearance. The scene portrays three women who, as they change from prison uniform to outside clothes, assume their social identity, their femininity, as well as their class position: Quilliam's clothes, dirty, a little ragged and out-of-fashion, signal both her class position and the out-modedness of 'traditional' working-classness. Monica's pearl earrings are small, delicate and tasteful, signifiers of 'quality'. You have to look closely to see them, but when you do, you realise that they are real; the pearls are not just an ornament or a piece of jewellery, they are over-determined signifiers of 'middle-classness'. Stella exists in opposition and antagonism to both the class positions the others signify and the figures who represent them: she despises the old working-class, their values and out-modedness, she envies the traditional middle-class, their authority, self-assurance and self-confidence - she recognises the quality of the pearls but simultaneously she refuses it, she wants people to see her jewellery, she wants to

be recognised for what she is: aspirant, modern and sexually active. Despite her engagement Stella presents herself as a young and sexual woman, as the prostitute she was 'before' her prison sentence.

The opening scenes of *Turn the Key Softly* have been discussed in some detail here because they so clearly establish the presentation of a class-specific femininity in mid-1950s Britain. Once established, the remainder of the film explores the concretisation of these through following the struggles and adjustments the women have to make in order to succeed in assuming their new identities. In doing this, *Turn the Key Softly* constantly re-works processes of loss/rejection and discovery/revelation, woven together across the three women's lives in their first hours of 'freedom' and their attempts to regain and reassert their identities. These processes test the women individually and function to situate them within proper modes of conduct and the correct expression for and embodiment of a modern womanliness that can adapt itself to new social formations.<sup>4</sup>

In the process of re-establishing their identities, each of the characters is set a

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<sup>4</sup>These are new feminine identities in the sense that the women are shown as almost having to learn anew how to *be* women on their release from prison, and they are also new in the sense that they correspond to a shift in the discursive formation of femininity in mid-50s Britain. This revolves around the shift of women in relation to consumerism and the production of a new and 'different' femininity - aspirant femininity constructed in relation to newly determined patterns of consumption. The film works to re-adjust the traditional middle- and working-class femininities of Monica and Quilliam and, at the same time, it presents the aspirant femininity of Stella as something that has to be policed - controlled and taught patterns of behaviour and appropriate forms of consumption.

'problem' to negotiate. Thus, Monica is visited by David (Terence Morgan) and persuaded to accompany him on another attempted burglary. In order to become a 'proper' woman she must abandon him on the rooftops of the West End's theatres and to eventual capture by the police. Quilliam overcomes the temptation to steal from a florist's shop a bunch of flowers that she wants to take to her daughter.

When she does see her daughter she is rejected and dismissed by a young woman who is ashamed and contemptuous of a mother who, in her eyes, has failed to adapt to the new working-class modernity (suburban living, respectable semi-skilled labour). Quilliam's only unconditional 'friend' is her dog, Johnny, who accepts her and loves her. Quilliam speaks of the dog as one would expect her to speak of an errant son or husband: 'Have you seen Johnny lately, I do hope he hasn't forgotten me', and when she finds him, 'Yes its me, its really me and I'm never going to leave you again.' On her way home from a celebratory dinner in the 'Monte Cristo' Restaurant with Monica, Stella and Johnny (to which Monica treated the other two women, for which Quilliam was grateful and over-awed and which Stella accepted with a grudging petulance, Illustration 13), Quilliam steps into a pub for a few minutes company. Whilst the two of them are in the pub, Johnny runs out of the door and is lost. The old woman searches frantically for the dog, sees him across the road from her and, as she runs to collect him, she is hit by a truck and killed. Monica, walking away from the imminent capture of David, arrives at the scene of the accident as the body of the old woman is lifted on a covered stretcher into an ambulance and Johnny is alone, whimpering by the side of the road. She takes the

dog home with her.

Although filled with sentimentality, these final scenes of *Turn the Key Softly* are significant for the way they clearly chart the boundaries for correct femininity. For Monica, the assumption of a 'proper' femininity or womanliness is predicated on the re-discovery of a set of ethical and moral values, which give her the courage to abandon her lover and her past. Middle-class femininity must become the repository of morality and an unstinting sense of right and wrong, but to complete her new role she must also become the guardian of the innocent and helpless. The film refuses the continued existence of an old-fashioned working-classness; there is no room in new models of womanliness for a femininity that is no longer sexual or fashionable. The evacuation of 'old' working-class woman leaves space only for the ascendance of a newly established type of working-class woman, embodied by Stella. And it is Stella who has the most difficulty in assuming an 'acceptable femininity'. After having coffee with her fiancé Bob, who gives her a packet of cigarettes (the first of which is smoked with an obvious relish and display of pure, sexualised pleasure) and three pounds with which to rent a room in a boarding house in Cricklewood,<sup>5</sup> Stella spends the time until her supper appointment with Monica and Quilliam wandering around the West End of London; she visits a

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<sup>5</sup>When Stella asks Bob how she can travel to Cricklewood he tells her that she can catch the Number 38 bus, to which she replies: 'I know the 38 bus, it goes down Shaftesbury Avenue and along Piccadilly.' Stella's past, and hence her 'weakness', are constantly evoked in comments she makes, in her gestures (the cigarettes), in her attitudes and in her obvious pleasure at being in the centre of the West End once again.

department store where luxurious and significantly expensive consumer goods are displayed in glittering glass cases and where she is mesmerized by a pair of gaudy and conspicuous earrings (these earrings are precisely the sort of earrings she had commented about to Monica when she dismissed Monica's earrings as 'too small' and discrete). She goes to the pictures - further signifying her 'frivolous' and 'susceptible' nature - and then for a drink in a bar with a group of her old friends; all of the women she drinks with are beautiful and glamorous, their conversation is about clothes, silk stockings, shoes - these women have foreign accents and laugh at Stella for wanting to marry Bob (a 'no hoper') when she could continue to make her living on the streets. These aspects of the presentation of Stella echo the way that the image of the prostitute has been used traditionally as a metaphor for the corruption of the body politic by 'easy money'. The next time we see Stella she has bought the earrings that so entranced her earlier, and to pay for them she has used the three pounds that Bob gave her for the room. Throughout the supper with Quilliam and Monica, Stella is sullen and bad tempered, and when she leaves the other two women she picks up a man in the bar of the restaurant.<sup>6</sup>

For Stella, then, the hurdles she has been set seem to be too much for her to overcome; she is weak (and recognises her weakness in an earlier comment to Bob, 'You think I'm weak don't you?') and easily seduced by a lifestyle that seems to

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<sup>6</sup>The man she picks up is the same man who had earlier attempted to make a date with Monica: he noticed her on the escalator to the tube and when he persisted she playfully told him that her name was Stella and that she would be at the 'Monte Cristo' later that day.

offer her access to the spending power she so desires. The dilemmas she is confronted with, and her ultimate 'salvation', revolve around two pairs of earrings: Monica's earrings, and the earrings she spends her only money on. Throughout the time she spends with the man she meets in the bar, he comments on her appearance, focusing on the earrings she is wearing: 'There's one thing I don't like about you Stella, those dreadful earrings. The Stella I met this morning didn't have earrings like that.' And it is only when she voluntarily relinquishes them that she is redeemed - having got the man drunk she takes him into an alleyway beside the bar, he gives her money and then passes out before any possible sexual encounter. Stella lifts the man's wallet from his jacket, takes only three pounds from it and leaves her 'unacceptable' earrings in his pocket.<sup>7</sup> (Illustration 14) Her submission of the earrings signifies her acceptance of her 'proper' place: a consumer, yes, but an honest consumer. Her appearance insists that she is seen as a subject in, and of, consumerism and Affluence. At the same time though, her position is uncertain and the struggle that she has to go through to become acceptable is more difficult than that of Monica or Quilliam, - for whom the struggle to 'find a place' is irrelevant. The earrings act as a trope for Stella's realisation of some sort of value system - throughout the film she is hesitant, unsure of herself and her position, it is only

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<sup>7</sup>Aspinall mistakenly asserts that Stella only gets the three pound back by granting the man 'her favours' (1983: 289). This is important since the scene depends upon the fact that Stella 'swaps' the earrings for the money and in doing so she refuses her former lifestyle; rather, she sees that her only viable option is to conform, to *negotiate* a new place for herself and if she does not do this totally honestly, she does retain some dignity at least.

when she refuses her past (condensed into an object, the earrings, and into a person, Quilliam, who metaphorically represents a redundant class formation) that she can both take a place in the new, modern society and have any sort of future.

As a signifier for aspirant working class femininity, Stella must adopt some of the courage, self-assuredness and discretion of traditional middle-classness (Monica).

Her hesitancy at the prison gate is echoed by her hesitancy to conform to the femininity that she has been offered, she does so in the end by accepting Bob and a life in the suburbs; Stella's final scene and words secure her in this role: 'Let's go to Cricklewood now Bob', 'Are you sure you want to come?' 'Yes!'

Thus, a newly emerging femininity which is unstable but energetic and vigorous is placed in an uneasy alliance with the middle-class; whilst Affluent femininity may be in flux, the direction it will take is clear. As I have shown though, the achievement of new feminine positions is achieved only at considerable cost. For Monica this has involved giving up both the dangerous excitement and the possibility for sexual activity and expression provided by her relationship with David; it is clear in the film that whilst she recognises the immorality and 'wrongness' of her previous way of life, it was also something that made her feel desirable and gave her pleasure and satisfaction, and her abandonment of her ex-lover is an act that removes any possibility for sexual fulfilment. I would argue that this is underlined further by her adoption of Quilliam's dog; her love for David, her sympathy for and protectiveness of the old woman are transferred onto Johnny and her future, as she walks into the distance with the dog in her arms, is



presented as one in which she will remain single, an archetype of the middle-class woman, disappointed and let-down by a man, finding comfort and solace in her work and her dog. For Quilliam, the assumption of a place within new models of appropriate femininity is not even a possibility; she is not only refused a place in the new structure, she is denied even an existence, however marginal. Finally, although Stella apparently willingly accepts her new place as suburban housewife whose spending power is central to Affluence, the spark of glamour and energy that she once had is diminished; her reformation and her affirmation do not appear to leave any gaps in which we can imagine her finding an imaginative space in which to keep alive her vibrancy and energetic sexuality.

*Turn the Key Softly* articulates three elements that were central to Affluence: the elevation of the working-class in material terms; the expectation that this working-class prosperity would and should be accompanied by an 'adoption' of traditional middle-class values; and the proposition that women and female behaviour were central to the discursive formation of 'the affluent fifties'. In its presentation of class-specific images of femininity *Turn the Key Softly* represents women in such a way that the visible signs of women's sexuality are also the signifiers of their class position - newly affluent working class women are recognisable by their display of the signs of consumerism and a sort of cheap, easily available sexuality that has to be policed, has to be controlled and kept in place. Similarly, the traditional middle-class woman is recognisable through her display of a tamed and discrete sexuality, and a discrete and tasteful consumption, this is a sexuality that must be

hidden and, ultimately, denied. The traditional working-class is a-sexual, and out of date.

This chapter has so far outlined a consistency in the construction of womanliness, in relation to a context of adaptations in the discursive formation of femininity throughout the period which are, in turn, related to and set against, real material and economic changes. This contradictory and complex movement has been traced from *Dance Hall* in which women with a degree of social and economic autonomy are exposed to the superficial lure of Americanisation and the ultimate impossibility of desire, to the presentation of what in the end is only one acceptable model of femininity in *Turn the Key Softly* - the aspirant working-class woman whose worst excesses are tempered by the imposition of a different mode of acceptable femininity; honest, tasteful consumerism in a stable relationship. This movement can be traced back to a social context in which specific notions of womanliness were foregrounded in relation to both the material conditions and the discursive formations of Austerity and Affluence.

This shift in the representation of femininity/womanliness can be exemplified further by comparing respondents' comments on two films more than ten years apart. The first refer to

Illustration 15



*Brief Encounter* :<sup>8</sup>

"Made a vivid impression on me at the time. Reflects the supposed morality of the time..." (J. Cadogan)

"Rather posh. We thought she was very naughty, but thought him to blame...." (I. Chapman)

"When I saw this film for the first time, I thoroughly enjoyed it - it was a woman's film, guaranteed to wring the heart strings! The ending was, for those days, inevitable, and was indicative of the times, I suppose. Perhaps that was why it was so emotional." (K. Dow)

"For me, one of the best films ever made!...The story was so believable, and the ending, though very sad, was the only possible one for me." (J. Stringer)

"...the first time [I saw it], I remember feeling the utter frustration of a woman bogged down by everyday life finding something exciting in her life, and then giving it up for her mundane life." (K. Woodward)

These comments reflect the contrariness of the film: on the one hand it admits the possibility of a middle-class woman having desires and needs whilst at the same time, the historical moment of the film, its existence in and as a part of Austerity, makes this an impossibility in the final instance. This argument is presented also by Antonia Lant:

'Because of her honesty of expression and appearance, her lack of a made-up face ... Celia Johnson's Laura forms the most effective part of

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<sup>8</sup>This film has been extensively written about in terms of the 'quality film', Britishness, the representation of Laura Jeesson as an exemplar of womanliness in the immediate post-war period and the ways that the film opens up an imaginative space for the exploration of female fantasy etc. (see for instance, Lant, 1991). I do not want to rehearse these arguments, but rather use *Brief Encounter* (as I have commented above, footnote 1, p. 152) as a counterpoint to the exploration of femininity and womanliness in a film from the latter part of the period in order to demonstrate the shifts which occurred throughout the period in relation to dominant notions of correct female behaviour and acceptable femininity and female sexuality.

*Brief Encounter's* "mask" of realism. The film can turn and depend on this absence of glamor for a morally secure outcome. Laura's looks circumscribe her actions and make it inconceivable that she should leave her post of wife and mother, make it impossible for her to live out a fantasy.' (Lant, 1991:192)

*Brief Encounter* can be located firmly within both the material conditions and the psychic framework of 1945 Britain. The austere nature of the mise-en-scène and the diegesis of the film is reflected in Laura's appearance and the situations in which she finds herself, whether she is in the home, the station tea-room, the cinema, or the Kardomah Café with its shabby gentility and its 'make-do-and-mend' air (see Lant: 153-96 for an extended discussion of these aspects of *Brief Encounter*). The presentation of Laura; her costume, refusal or denial of sexual excitement and ultimately her domesticity and complicity, all reflect the impossibility for women within both the material and the psychic confines of the moment of Austerity.

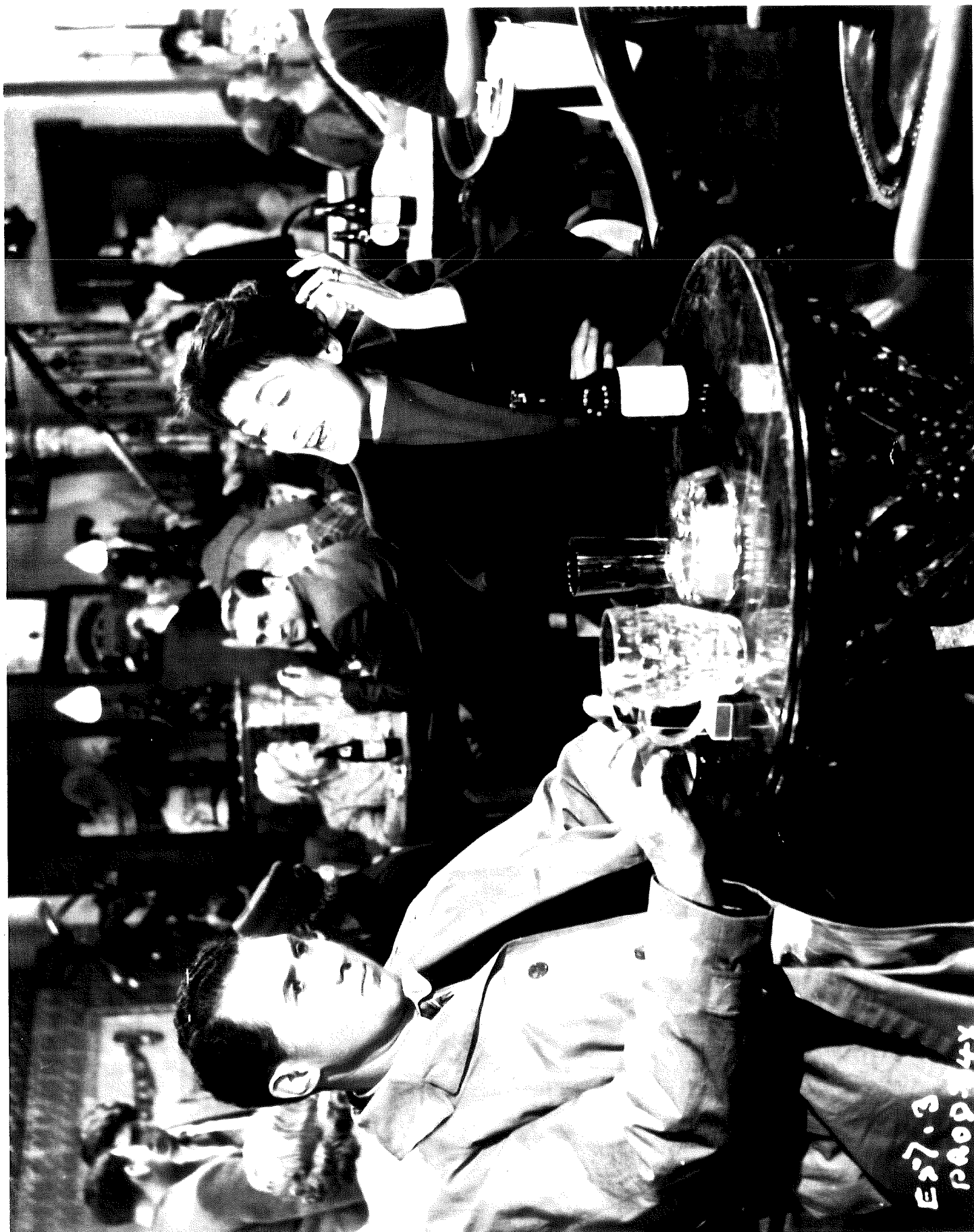
However, the discursive and social pressures brought to bear on femininity and sexuality reveal the tensions in these constructions with two films in particular that both expose the limits of discourse and ruthlessly punish the image of woman for her inability - or refusal - ultimately to be contained: *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and *Yield to the Night* (see Chapter 6).

"My clearest memory of this is my reaction to it, pity for the wife ... and anger against the husband and other woman for allowing their love affair to develop." (E. Bradbury)

"This film made you think. Women were so conditioned to being secondary to men. I felt it was quite frightening to see how marriage could deteriorate from glamour to this." (A. Frodsham)



Illustration 16



'I suppose we would call this a "sordid" film, and be horrified to think the woman could get into this careless state.' (E. Torrance)

These comments refer to *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and for the women who remember this film what is striking is the way that the 'blame' is laid firmly at the feet of Amy (Yvonne Mitchell). As some of the above comments on *Brief Encounter* testify, whereas Laura is in some way admired or praised for breaking away, for trying to find 'happiness' and excitement and whilst she is often applauded for 'doing the decent thing' in the end, the most common response to Amy is that she is guilty of failing to 'keep her man', that it is she who traverses the boundaries which have been laid out for her as a wife and mother and that it is she who fails to conform, who fails to make the necessary and expected effort to maintain her position within the family, within the domestic realm. There is another comparison between *Brief Encounter* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* which is worth pointing out: the theme of adultery. In the first film it is Laura who threatens domestic and familial stability and who also threatens to disrupt the category of femininity and sexuality within the codes of British films of the period. In *Woman in a Dressing Gown* however, it is Jim (Anthony Quayle), Amy's husband, who is the adulterer. The 'other woman' (Sylvia Syms as Georgie) is a clear 'pre-echo' of women in the cluster of social realist, or 'kitchen sink' films of the late-1950s and early-1960s; she is aspirant, modern and signifies the possibility for the expression of a previously repressed sexuality - she is also secured in the place of 'wrongdoer' by the narrative closure of the film. In so far as *Woman in a Dressing Gown* provides a mirror to *Brief Encounter*, the ultimate containment of

Amy and her efforts to conform to her allotted place within the domestic sphere, compares to that of Laura in *Brief Encounter*. The central differences in the films reside in the ways that this is achieved and the fact that *Woman in a Dressing Gown* offers Amy no space within which she can even explore imagined alternatives (see Hill, 1986: 97-8).

Thus, in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* we see the consummate failure of a woman who cannot conform to the demands of new forms of aspirant consumption; she has neither a place nor an interest in consumerism and her only attempt to enter into an acceptable representation of femininity or an acceptable mode of female behaviour is disastrous, as outlined below. Amy is an echo of the un-reconstructed working-class 'womanhood' signified by Quilliam in *Turn the Key Softly*: with Amy (and Quilliam) one cannot speak of the imaging of woman in terms of womanliness or femininity precisely because it is her failure to achieve this, according to the demands of modernity, which is under investigation - it is this failure which is her 'problem'. Thus, Amy is denied any power, either sexual or spending, because she is unable to take her place within a femininity which is premised upon relations of consumption.

*Woman in a Dressing Gown* contains and continues many of the themes already touched upon in this chapter. I want to draw out these themes in order to discuss *Woman in a Dressing Gown* as a film that marks a significant shift in British Cinema's representation of femininity in the period - one that fully explores the



Illustration 17



relationship of women to marriage, domesticity and femininity and which offers no 'hope', no alternative and which presents the 'working woman' who also wants to be a wife and mother as an impossibility. In so far as the other films discussed do offer any alternative to domesticity, *Woman...* (as I shall now refer to it) completely closes off these alternatives. It does this through its visual style (the framing of shots, scenes and characters) and its use of music as well as through the narrative structure. Each of these elements makes an impact upon the others, producing a film, the visual style of which as well as its outcome, is narrow, confined and over-whelming. The diegesis of *Woman...* is relentlessly grim: evoking Austerity through both the visual as well as the ideological and psychic containment of women in a way that is, ultimately, claustrophobic and inescapable.

The film opens in the flat where Amy, Jim and Brian (their son) live. Here, as in the very first scenes in *Dance Hall*, there is loud music and for Amy, as for the women in *Dance Hall*, the music signifies an alternative, imaginative space that enables both an escape from and a way of surviving in 'the real world'. She uses it as a way of helping her to prepare breakfast and to carry out her domestic chores (for the women in *Dance Hall* music is both an aid to the monotony and drudgery of factory work and a device which facilitates the expression of different, sexual selves through dancing). But music also plays the same role in *Woman..* as it does in *Brief Encounter*: it is an escape route, creating a space in which Amy (as well as Laura) can dream - can be 'carried away' into a different, more romantic, world - and be emotionally moved. As Amy comments at one point: 'Tchaikovsky makes

me want to cry'. Yet these similarities do not extend very far: where Rachmaninov haunts *Brief Encounter* and provides Laura with a productive imaginative space, and whereas the women in *Dance Hall* find the opportunity for escape in both the music and movement provided in Big Band dance music, for the most part, the music Amy listens to on the wireless is military music. This music provides both a frame for and a contrast to her life, rather than the opportunity for escape from it. On the one hand, the music which pervades the flat evokes the confinement and conformity associated with regimentation and echoed in the constricting lay-out of the flat. Yet on the other hand, the almost continuous presence of military marching music - co-ordinated, perfectly timed and precise - acts as a direct contrast to the chaotic, inefficient and discordant world that Amy constantly attempts to order. The constant repetition of marching underpins the constant repetition and fruitlessness of Amy's domestic life - constantly in motion but never 'progressing' (see below on this lack of mobility in *Woman...*).<sup>9</sup>

For Amy, her home is a source of constant labour, an environment over which she has some degree of control, but only in so far as it is seen as her environment (Illustration 15). For Jim, the flat is the source of his 'weakness' and a sign of his frustration; this is most clearly presented in his conversations with Georgie (Sylvia Syms) who, at one point tells him: 'You mustn't weaken. If you draw back now

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<sup>9</sup>Brian, Amy and Jim's son, is the one character in the film for whom the possibility of escape and achievement seems likely. However, whilst he has the freedom of mobility and experience that Amy and Jim do not, the end of the film undermines this by securing him in the domestic, familial relationship.

you're finished, you'll have this for the rest of your life.' The claustrophobia and sense of hopelessness that pervades this film is underlined by the way in which the scenes are shot: the flat is approached from outside, we see inside it through the windows, framed by curtains; once inside the flat, the shots are filmed in such a way that we see the characters framed by bookshelves, ladder shelves, bannisters, the framework of the metal bedstead.<sup>10</sup> Juxtaposed against the chaos, noise, frustration and hopelessness represented by Amy and her home is the order, peacefulness and the potential haven that Georgie's world signifies. Yet whilst Jim's affair is presented as a possible escape route for him, the promise of freedom and excitement are undermined once again by the way in which the scenes are shot. We see into Georgie's flat through the metal railings of the fence outside her window, once inside we look out at the rain through the same metal fence rails. This is a basement flat, all vistas are framed by bars of some sort and once inside, the tidiness is as stifling as is the chaos of Amy's home. The dialogue between the lovers reflects this aura of dullness. Whilst Jim and Georgie speak of their future life together and of their love for one another, their voices are flat, almost emotionless; their dialogue not only lacks emotional charge but it is stilted,

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<sup>10</sup>In his brief outline of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* John Hill discusses the ways that the cinematic techniques of framing used in the film mitigate against audience identification with the characters and this creates a distancing effect that alienates the audience (1986: 97-100). These are discussed here in terms of the ways that the shooting of particular scenes prevents the evocation of any sense of tenderness between, for instance, Jim and Georgie. In addition, a more detailed discussion of this particular distancing effect is covered in relation to *Yield to the Night* which was directed by J. Lee Thompson as was *Woman in a Dressing Gown*.

Illustration 18



Illustration 19



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delivered with fatalistic resignation and a hopeless recognition of their incompatibility. The following exchange is typical and, coupled with its delivery, utterly undermines any sense of the two as a couple passionately in love with one another:

Georgie: 'I always imagined the man I would fall in love with smoked a pipe, worked outside at some interesting job and loved music: you smoke cigarettes, work inside at some dull job and you hate music.'

Jim: 'I was the first man in your life, you were ready to fall in love...I just want you to be sure, I'm a lot older than you.'

Even during the love-making scene in Georgie's flat for instance, a scene which should be tender and moving, neither character appears to be involved - Georgie stares off frame, her face a mask which registers nothing.

*Woman...* is permeated by this combination of hopelessness and an utter lack of mobility, it is this that makes the film striking and gives it its particular place in this study. On the one hand, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* rests uneasily in the late 1950s, on the other hand it is perhaps one of the most revealing films from the period when considered in relation to the particular constructions and presentations of femininity that have been discussed so far.

The historical moment in which *Woman...* was produced and exhibited may suggest that the representation of female characters in it would be more open, more suggestive of change, than is the case. Whilst the image of a modern, working, aspirant woman is present in the character of Georgie - young, attractive, in control of both her and (it seems) Jim's life - the image created of her is that of a

manipulative, cold and unemotional woman who although conforming to preferred modes of consumption and display (her flat and her appearance are testimony to this, as is her success at her job), has somehow failed to 'fit' properly. The man she falls in love with is not as she would have expected him to be; he does not accord with the modern man, young, active and aspirant. In addition, although she is given some actual physical mobility (we see her outside in the street, going somewhere), she is mostly contained within the home (both hers and Amy's) or the workplace. Unlike *Dance Hall* or *Turn the Key Softly* there is no place or space in *Woman...* which plays the role that the dance hall or the restaurant do in the other films. There is a scene in a pub in *Woman...* but it is not a place of leisure or enjoyment; whilst Amy joins in the pub singing, it is not a joyous or spontaneous display in the way that dancing is for the women in *Dance Hall*, and for Jim the experience seems tortuous (Illustration 16).

For the women in the other films discussed in this chapter the possibility of escape through mobility, geographical or social, is real - even though it may nearly always fail - and the primary way in which this potential is represented is through the women's entry into 'correct' or 'proper' patterns of consumption, either of material possessions, of the experience of 'glamour' (Stella in *Turn the Key Softly*), or the 'consumption' of a reality that has been transformed into fantasy (Georgie in *Dance Hall*, Laura in *Brief Encounter*). In *Woman...* however, the presentation of a 'failed' femininity through the figures of Amy and Georgie is not approached in relation to their being somehow disabused of the 'unreality' of consumption, or by



their recognition that the signs of Affluence are not all there is (as with Stella and the earrings), but the failure to achieve 'womanliness' is presented in terms of an inability to consume.

Amy's inability even to enter into relations of consumption extends across her whole life, for Georgie it is signified through her appearance and her demeanour. Georgie looks right, she is neat, perfectly groomed and above all discrete, but this has been achieved (it appears) through control and effort. In some ways her appearance is like that of Monica in *Turn the Key Softly* but whereas Monica's femininity is 'right' - that is, it is knowable and identifiable in terms of her self-assuredness, her knowledge of her class and the security this offers her, and whilst she displays the passion, vulnerability, moral standards and, eventually, strength that 'real' women, even those created by British Cinema, must always possess - Georgie's femininity is 'off', nothing quite rings true. Georgie is more like Stella's prostitute than Monica's ultimately self-assured and successful middle-class woman - there is no pleasure here, simply efficiency.

In one sense, Georgie does represent a successful femininity according to the terms of Affluence - neat, tidy, efficient, aspirant and materially successful, absorbed into her role as 'career girl'. However, she has failed in another sense; she is emotionless, unaffected by the calls of pleasure and desire, she is not (the film does not let her be) a subject in and of consumerism in the way that Stella is, but she is, like Stella, 'made safe'. Whereas for Stella this is a matter of the control of an

active female sexuality, and the restraint of excessive and cheap consumption, for Georgie, her inability to feel, to display true passion and emotion produce a female figure that is bereft of passion and sexuality. Georgie's femininity seems premised upon a set of aspirations and drives which have no object in terms of self, but which are directed purely at a notion of what she needs (how she must present herself to the world) in order to appear to be, to seem to be, a 'real woman' - the perfectly constructed consumer citizen.

This is perhaps most clearly shown when she goes to Amy and Jim's flat (Illustration 17). Situated in the middle of real life - the emotional chaos wrought by her affair with Jim and the pain and turmoil emanating from Amy, Jim and Brian - Georgie appears not to feel, not to be affected. When Amy talks to her about how she feels, what she has sacrificed for her husband, how she knows him and still loves him, Georgie cannot react - she flinches but remains 'calm, cool and efficient'. It is as if the persona she has adopted cannot allow her to show (or, by now prevents her from displaying) any emotion, any chinks: it may be a 'perfect femininity' but it is, nevertheless, a failed femininity.

Amy's failure to conform to 'proper' modes of womanliness touches all aspects of her character and seems to surround her whole being. In one scene where Georgie and Jim are talking about his marriage, Jim attempts to excuse Amy for her 'untidiness' (the manifest reason why he has the affair): 'Amy isn't a bad person, at least she tries. She hasn't always been like this.' Georgie replies that 'When

women get married, that's when they should try most.' This exchange is important because it encapsulates the problem, the locus of Amy's failure, and it mis-credits it. It is not that Amy doesn't try, the film shows us that she tries constantly, it is that she cannot do or be what is asked of her: she cannot enter into the model of femininity constructed by Affluence which is the only one available to her. Whilst Georgie seems to be constructed as a woman who lacks an essential element of 'humanity' - emotional involvement and the capacity to feel - Amy is nothing but emotion. In this sense she may be 'the perfect woman'; she is self-sacrificing, she tries hard to please, to be wife, mother, friend and support to both her family and her neighbour, Hilda. But in terms of the ideological demands made of her she is incapable.

The most poignant scene in the film clearly demonstrates and overdetermines Amy's abjection. Driven by the threatened loss of her husband (which she later, unconvincingly, presents to him as an opportunity for her to develop into a self-sufficient, independent woman), Amy attempts to adopt the 'proper' mode of late-1950s feminine appearance and behaviour; she struggles to enter into the newly established patterns of consumption.

Having very little money (which she has borrowed from her son) she pawns her engagement ring in order to have her hair styled and to buy a bottle of whisky for the meeting between her, Jim and Georgie. Excluded from (or having previously refused) the 'live now pay later' world of hire-purchase which blossomed in the

late 1950s, Amy doesn't know how to complete the transaction - she doesn't haggle over the amount of money offered for the ring, she is grateful and embarrassed, explaining to the pawnbroker her 'special reasons' for needing the money. When she visits the hairdressers she asks for but has no real idea what 'the latest hairstyle' is. The manageress and her assistant know that Amy is irretrievable but she believes that a 'wash and set' will transform her, make her into a modern woman - as she leaves the hairdresser's shop the two women who work there exchange a look which signifies their contempt and derision for a woman who clearly cannot conform, who is so obviously unable to adapt to the demands of modern femininity. However, it is not that she hasn't tried, rather it seems that she is somehow outside, marginalised. With a 'new' hairstyle and a half-bottle of whisky Amy believes that she has achieved some level of acceptability, but when she steps outside it is raining - her hair is ruined, her attempt to recreate herself in accordance to the requirements of womanliness is finally thwarted, not by her inability to conform but by some sort of ultimate rejection by and from the 'modern world' (Illustration 18).

Reaching her home, Amy attempts to salvage her attempt to don femininity by changing her clothes and putting on her 'special dress'. In her un-coordinated panic she breaks the zip- fastener on the dress and puts on her dressing-gown instead (Illustration 19). This is just one short sequence in the film, but it is pivotal, for it moves Amy full circle - from dressing-gown and untidiness, to a failed attempt to re-create herself according to dominant notions of what femininity is and how it is

to be acted out, to a recognition of failure and the re-assumption of her dressing-gown. This final resignation is accompanied by the destruction of the tidy environment which she has previously created, when she searches through crammed cupboards and scatters the objects on the table all over the floor. *Woman in a Dressing Gown* demonstrates Amy's inability to enter into a late-1950s model of womanliness. Coupled with the way in which the film prevents any possibility of mobility for any of the characters, the epic struggle and eventual failure depicted in this sequence forecloses any positive options for Amy and (by implication and example, rather than by association), for women in Britain in the late 1950s.

The final scene of *Woman...* sets the seal on the notion of a restrictive formation for womanliness. The camera watches from outside of the window, looking in as the rain streams down the glass with the curtains obscuring some of the interior as Jim, re-inserted into the family, sits at the table with Brian whilst Amy, back in her dressing-gown, is in the kitchen, in the background of the tableau, separated from the two men by the lines created by the mostly empty bookshelves.<sup>11</sup>

In this chapter I have argued that *Dance Hall*, *Turn the Key Softly* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* embody the ways that femininity was presented according to newly dominant notions of womanliness that rested upon assumptions about women's

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<sup>11</sup>It is perhaps not insignificant that the bookshelves do not contain any books since this is a signifier of the family's class position - not literary, not educated, but 'low-brow' and 'ordinary', a rather ambiguous class position that signifies their place in relation to the shifting class relations of Affluence.

appropriate roles and position in post-war society. In *Dance Hall* the potential signified by the particular brand of spectacular consumerism embodied in Americanisation was seen to be unviable as a channel of 'escape' from the material realities of Austerity. The presentation of femininity in this film places womanliness within the boundaries of Austerity and links working-class femininity with a domesticity that is constructed in tension with women's 'traditional' domestic roles and a 'new' womanliness. *Dance Hall* ultimately denies the imaginative space offered by consumption and glamour and instead reconciles the characters to a life of hardship and boredom, alleviated only by dreams and fantasies of other, glamorous and exciting worlds. For the characters of *Turn the Key Softly*, the possibility for alternative expressions of femininity is foreclosed by the foregrounding of a newly determined, differently accentuated femininity that is produced through, and comprehensible chiefly in relation to, new patterns of consumption. Here, an affluent and aspirant femininity is ascendant over both a 'traditional' working-class femininity, unable to conform to a new role - an outmoded subjectivity that could not modernise itself - and a bourgeois middle-class femininity that is somehow 'beyond' consumerism. In *Turn the Key Softly* it is the nature of consumption that is crucial: Monica's consumption is 'naturally' tasteful and discrete, 'naturally' geared towards 'quality' and discretion rather than ostentatious display, whereas Stella's consumption is, by the same token, 'naturally' cheap and flashy. Stella's consumerism is something that must be educated, trained towards refinement; nevertheless, it is Stella's consumerism and

her expression of a modern, aspirant and ambitious femininity that is the driving force of Affluence as discussed above in Chapter 2. Finally, *Woman in a Dressing Gown* was discussed in relation to its contrast with *Brief Encounter*; here it can be seen that the expression of an 'alternative' imaginative space for feminine behaviour was less possible in the late-1950s than in the immediate post-war years. Where it is possible to see in *Brief Encounter* that womanliness was circumscribed by the requirements of representation to reflect dominant notions of women's central relationship to domesticity and motherhood, it is nevertheless the case that this film at least permits a space for fantasy and the expression of desire. In *Woman in a Dressing Gown* there is no such equivalent space for Amy, instead she is so trapped by the demands of Affluence that her inability to adapt to a late-1950s model of appropriate femininity that is predicated on consumption means that she has no imaginative or fantastical space, her only possible escape is through her son, Brian, and the chance that he will attain social mobility and independence. Moreover, through the character of Georgie we can see that 'successful' Affluent femininity is grounded in a loss of desire, in the transformation of womanliness from the active but controlled femininity and sexuality that Stella represents, to a womanliness that has lost even the ability to transgress cultural norms of appropriate or proper behaviour. In Georgie we see the expression of a modern, British femininity that is constructed as a consumer citizen - a femininity that is constituted as "something that has to be put on, acted or worn as an external appendage." (Bowlby, 1985: 28.)

## **CHAPTER 5: Critical Discourse and the Female Audience**

In previous Chapters I have focused on the following areas: first, the presentation of the years 1945-1958 as an identifiable period that contains within it the social experiences and discursive formations of 'Austerity', 'Affluence' and 'Americanisation'. These have been understood as discourses in the sense of an ensemble of concepts, vocabularies and organising ideas that are central to a comprehension of the socio-economic and cultural conditions in which new, or differently accentuated, forms of feminine subjectivity were shaped and produced, with particular consequences for the foregrounding of newly dominant notions of women's role and position in post-war Britain. This broad contextualisation then focused in Chapter 3 on the more specific context in which women's experiences of the period, in terms of their roles as workers, citizens, mothers and consumers, were held in tension with the ways that these were produced. Attention was also given to the ways in which certain fears about women's roles as 'proper' wives and mothers were articulated across a range of sites that attempted to contain femininity within dominant social conventions. In the light of these contextualising chapters, the fourth chapter discussed selected films from the period in order to demonstrate the ways in which British films contributed to this re-construction, particularly through the incorporation



and formation of notions of 'correct' expressions of femininity. So far it has been shown that femininity was limited in its expression through films because of the ways that it was constructed according to prevailing notions that linked 'appropriate' womanliness to class. In turn, the construction and presentation of classed femininities relied upon notions of women's specific relationship to Britain's newly developing consumer society and the centrality of women as consumers to Affluence. As discussed in Chapter 2, the 'problem' with Affluence was not so much the idea of increased working-class prosperity but the expression of fears about the erosion of 'traditional' notions of 'taste' and 'value'; these anxieties reflected post-war disruptions to class relations and hierarchies and were expressed primarily in relation to fears about the 'corrupting' influence of Americanisation and the apparent ease and relish with which the working-classes were seen to be entering into new patterns of consumption. In the figure of Stella in *Turn the Key Softly* for instance, we saw the displacement of fears about working-class consumerism onto aspirant femininity in an attempt to temper the worst, 'tasteless' excesses of consumerism, and its association with the gratification of consumption understood in primarily sexual terms.

The movement between an immediate post-war 'age of austerity' and the 'affluent society' of the mid-1950s was inscribed onto both the bodies of real women and their cinematic representations. This was achieved both through the sorts of cinematic representations discussed in the preceding chapter and through the evocation of

particular notions of womanliness within the formations of Austerity, Affluence and Americanisation. However, the presentation of particular notions of femininity was not confined to social, economic or explicitly ideological discourse, nor to the realm of cinematic representation, but can also be detected in the arena of cultural criticism. In Chapter One, I outlined the 'starting point' for this research: the ways that critics seemed unable to write about *Yield to the Night* and my desire to understand the conception of the female audience that underpinned this writing.

Retrospectively, this critical projection of the female audience for British films reflects the uniformity with which femininity was constructed at this time: we have seen that women were necessary to the presentation of preferred notions of Britishness and that representations of femininity were shaped by notions of class and the expression of appropriate behaviours; it is through an examination of the ways that femininity was expressed in critical discourse that we can see just how prevalent such assumptions about femininity were.

By looking across representative examples of critical writing at this time, it is possible to gauge the extent to which dominant ideas permeated all aspects of the culture. For this task, I chose two publications from the period that occupy divergent places in terms of respective levels of 'influence' and popularity - *Penguin Film Review* (1946-9) and *The Picturegoer* (1930-60). In these publications, notions of the cinema audience are linked with particular types of British film, specifically, the 'quality

film'. This is a British Cinema that exists within the dominant 'realist tradition' and this was another factor in the selection of 'realist' films for discussion in the previous chapter. Where consideration of critical commentary contributes to previous chapters is in its presentation of femininity as corporeal, in its equation of women with 'the biological', 'the natural' and 'the emotional': these are important for aspects of the discussion contained in the following chapter on *Yield to the Night* and, furthermore, add another dimension to the picture of femininity as it was constructed in Britain throughout the period.

To begin with, I would re-iterate the distinction between 'the audience' as a sociological category that can be studied statistically, and 'the public' that can be understood as a matter of assumptions and projections - identifiable, as T.J. Clark argues, in the "silences and caesuras of normal discourse" (Clark, 1973: 12, and see above, Chapter 1). This distinction is particularly relevant here since, as we shall see, the female audience is rarely invoked directly in terms of women's voices, rather the notion of a 'feminine' public underpins writing about the cinema audience in a way that reveals both its exclusion from dominant notions about cinema audiencehood, and its construction as a 'force' that is unknowable and derided. In both the publications discussed below we find this conception of the 'feminine public'; this is not necessarily a uniquely female public, since the ascription of 'feminine' qualities can just as easily be made to similarly unknowable sub sections of the cinema public, such

as the 'youth audience' or, what is characterised in *Penguin Film Review* as the 'film-struck section'. Andreas Huyssen has addressed the question of the attribution of 'feminine' qualities to a 'mass' public in relation to nineteenth century modernism and the conjunction of femininity with 'the mass' and with the products of 'mass culture'.<sup>1</sup> For Huyssen, that which is devalued and vilified within Modernism - the inauthentic, the trivial and the subjective - is gendered as feminine and these apparently feminine characteristics are represented as a threat, 'a force' that will potentially undermine and subvert the creation of 'true art' which is 'authentic' and 'serious'. This construction of the feminine mass is one that coincides with critical commentary on the female audience and which reinforces established notions of the masculine nature of modernity; women are allied with the products of a certain type of popular cinema, for instance a type identified with the products of Hollywood and American culture (even where it was British).

In so far as explicit references to the female audience are largely excluded from projections of 'the audience' in these texts, then a different approach is required in order to locate it; it is not to be found in overt references but in exclusions, inconsistencies and contradictions within more general statements about film and viewers. A projected feminine audience can be identified through the analysis of

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<sup>1</sup>Andreas Huyssen: "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other", in Huyssen, 1991: 44-62.

groups of statements which are in turn formulated within a specific set of cultural relations; thus it can be seen that the female audience emerges - unsurprisingly - in accord with more generally situated ideas about femininity from the period discussed so far. And what is striking about the construction of the female audience in the two texts I will examine is precisely the way that, across two different modes of writing with different readerships and different agendas, there is a commonality in the ways that the female audience is projected, such that it re-evokes aspects of Foucault's definition of a discursive formation:

"...whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say...that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*..."(Foucault, 1985 (1974): 38, emphasis in the original.)

### **Penguin Film Review**

The publication of *Penguin Film Review* spanned only nine issues and four years,<sup>2</sup> but it expressed a precise and determined project which remained constant. This is clearly outlined in the following statement by the editorial board from the first issue:

"*Penguin Film Review* is a new publication which will survey the field of cinema from a wide and international standpoint for the existence of a progressive review which recognises the importance of the cinema in modern

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<sup>2</sup>*Penguin Film Review* (*PFR* from here) was originally published in nine parts between 1946 and 1949. All references here are contained in the collected edition: Roger Manvell (executive editor): *The Penguin Film Review 1946-1949*, The Scholar Press, London, 1977. The editorial board of *PFR* consisted of R.K. Neilson Baxter, Roger Manvell and H.H. Wollenberg.

society. [With an] ambition...to assemble contributions from writers of many countries who are studying the economic, social and aesthetic problems which the existence of motion pictures has caused ... The public which *Penguin Film Review* hopes to serve is that growing minority among the millions of regular cinema-goers to whom the statements made above will appeal, as well as the many thousands working in all branches of the film industry who take their profession seriously.” (*PFR* no. 1: 7-8)

Two important features of the *Review* are apparent here: the project of *PFR* to increase and broaden an understanding of ‘the cinema’ and ‘the film’ through investigation and criticism; and the specific representation of the cinema audience as ‘interested in’ and ‘critical of’ the products of various national cinemas. Whilst the editorial statement recognises its limited appeal, *PFR* clearly demanded the establishment of film as an academic discipline, with the *Review* playing a central role in the foundation of a new pedagogical tradition, thus revealing itself as part of a wider hegemonic project.<sup>3</sup>

“... the *Penguin Film Review* remains of crucial significance. For there are few

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<sup>3</sup>Although the readership of *PFR* was small compared to large circulation journals or magazines, the Editors claimed that *PFR* “never had a readership of less than 25,000” (no. 7: 128).

This claim must be considered in relation to the circulation of other journals which had a comparable influence on cultural formations. For instance, *Scrutiny* had a first print run of 750 copies, rising to 1,000 by the third edition (see Francis Mulhern, 1979: 45), whilst the circulation of *Screen* was and has remained equally small by comparison. Although it has to be recognised that the readerships of both *Scrutiny* and *Screen* may well have been far in excess of the number of copies printed, the question of circulation and respective influence are related to the extent to which journals and periodicals, such as *PFR*, *Scrutiny* and *Screen*, can be seen to have had considerable pedagogical impact. For example, *Scrutiny* informed a tradition of English Literature and played a crucial role in establishing a new ‘literary canon’, whilst *Screen* influenced a generation of Film Studies approaches and academic courses. For *PFR* Roger Manvell claims that it helped to “establish a permanent readership for both serious journals and books on the film and film-makers”, 1977: viii.

other cinema publications of the post-war period which capture so exactly the intense mood of enthusiasm and idealism that swept through Britain in the 40s. There was a clear feeling (soon to be thwarted) that British cinema and indeed British culture generally, had come through the war with its head held high and that the way ahead to even greater glories was clearly signposted in the years of reconstruction." (Geoff Brown, 1978: 242. This essay is a reappraisal of *PFR* on the publication of the 1977 collected edition.)

Belief in the ability of *PFR* to play a central role in both the academicisation of film and the education of 'the audience', and to contribute to the continued success of post-war British films is manifest in the following two extracts.

'The word "film" is no longer automatically associated in people's minds with a particular kind of Hollywood feature film ... The war years have brought about a marked change in the public cinemas ... There is not only a far greater serious interest in informational films among cinema audiences, but also an increasing preference for the more *authentic* and *realistic* depiction of people and their environment which has characterised many wartime British feature films ... This new note of *seriousness*, and the *desire to move in a world of actuality and not in a world of illusion and escape*, are real things.' (*PFR*, no. 1: 63, my emphasis)

Here, Sinclair Road claims to perceive a shift in the motivation of the audience: a new desire to see films which reflect 'everyday life' and 'reality', films which are 'authentic' and 'real'. It is this audience which, I will argue, constitutes the cinema audience as far as *PFR* is concerned. An audience which is exacting and demanding, a critical audience that will be influential in the creation and re-construction of a national cinema. This audience is one which, following the lead supplied by the critic, can shape the nature of British film production. As Rachael Low writes:

'... it seems that if the critic has any function more useful than a weekly demonstration of his own good taste, it must be largely one of *popular education*, a task of tremendous responsibility if the artistic development of the

film is not to be accompanied by a widening gap between esoteric “art” films and undisguised “dope” films.’ (*PFR*, no. 7: 112, emphasis in the original.)

The question, then, becomes one of determining whether this audience is a ‘real’ audience - that is, an independent ‘already existing’ audience which is motivated by precisely those concerns identified above. Or is this audience one which is, in large measure, ‘constructed’ through *PFR*’s discourse, a utopian, ideal audience that exists only in *PFR*’s address to it?

I will show that not only is the ‘independent’, ‘critical’, ‘educated’, ‘demanding’ audience precisely constructed in and through *PFR*’s discursive formation of *the* ‘audience’ but that it is contained within (and part of) a more influential discursive construction: that of the ‘quality film’. It becomes difficult, therefore, to discuss further *PFR*’s audience without first paying attention to its implication in the ‘quality film’ discourse.

### **The Audience and the ‘Quality Film’**

In an exhaustive and comprehensive analysis John Ellis (1978) has identified the development of discourses of the ‘quality film’ across a range of publications, such as newspapers, weekly magazines, journals and periodicals throughout the period 1942-8 - years during which, he argues, the discourse was at its most productive and active.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See Ellis, 1978: 18-9 for both a list of sources used and the names of critics whose writing was examined. Ellis argues that “These magazines provide a remarkable



Ellis maintains that at this time the writing of a widespread and diverse group of critics identified and validated a particular type of film - the 'quality film' - which they hoped and believed would influence British Film production. In his analysis, Ellis's task was to:

'show[s] the way in which *at a particular time* the notion of "quality film" was constituted. It shows the way in which the "quality film" is produced by a whole network of terms in a particular organisation. Some of these terms are given specific meaning only within this particular discourse, others (such as the particular version of humanism and nationalism) come from more generalised ideological practices. What qualifies this particular series of utterances of particular writers as "a discourse" is the fact that it constitutes an object (the "quality film") which can then be identified across particular practices. This discourse is neither perfectly stable nor totally exclusive: it draws upon terms constituted elsewhere so that it can base its particular organisation and production within a definite ideological universe ... It is equally never in a state of absolute coherence and exhaustive exploration of all its terms.' (1978: 17, emphasis in the original)

The terms of the discourse are clearly marked in *PFR* and can be traced throughout its duration. By presenting in full the following selection of extracts, the extent to which the audience is implicated in them and constructed through their articulation becomes clear:

"British films have come to possess a *craftsmanship* and *freshness* above the regular flow from Hollywood. By contrast they seem miracles of *taste* and *intelligence*." (*PFR*, no. 1: 29, my emphasis)

"The very mission of the cinema is to make men realise that they are brethren. The effect of films cannot be over-estimated ... it is my opinion that films with

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diversity of contributors and a remarkable consistency in writing, a sure indication that a discursive system is in operation rather than freak and isolated individual outpourings in some private and appropriated language." (19)

a purpose beyond that of mere *superficial* entertainment should find far greater encouragement and appreciation ... *pure entertainment films* ... should be supplemented by a far larger number of *think films*.” (PFR, no. 4: 10, my emphasis)

‘British films have got themselves into their present position on what audiences call their “reality”. What they really mean is that the best British films have *integrity*, a very different thing.’ (PFR, no. 4: 31, my emphasis)

“The experience of the war years produced a *stillness* of the spirit which emerges in such films as *The Way to the Stars* and *Brief Encounter*. The emotions associated with *heroism* in action or in suffering were successfully understood in films like *San Demetrio London* ... *The Gentle Sex* ... *Millions Like Us*, *The Captive Heart* ... Though these films may not be thought of as poetic in treatment, there are moments in all of them when *the prosaic aspects of human relationships in a common service are transcended*, and the *illumination of a finer emotional quality* is revealed as clearly as in the more distinguished work of the war poets.” (PFR, no. 6: 123, my emphasis)

‘The public will always pay to see a well-made film on a subject of topical interest provided that the approach is *sincere* and the audience is taken into the confidence of the film producers. In my opinion British film producers since the war have let the film-going public down badly ... They have given us glamour, but it is the meretricious and outdated glamour of the blonde cuties singing in a night club ... we have had the “Spiv” thrust down our throats ... We have had precious little *healthy* laughter ... and hardly any of the *integrity* and *poetry* that were wrung out of the war.’ (PFR, no. 8: 73, my emphasis)

The references in this final extract to ‘sincerity’, ‘healthy laughter’, ‘integrity’ betray a deeply held anxiety about the degenerate and the subversive, as embodied in the figure of ‘the Spiv’. These hang-overs from the war, from the ‘black market’, resonated with a sense of a ‘betrayal of the country’ and an ever present sexual threat whilst most men were away from home (perhaps one out-shadowed by the GI, but there nevertheless), were portrayed in films such as *Good Time Girl*, *It Always Rains on Sunday*, *They Made Me a Fugitive* (all 1947) extending to David Farrar’s ‘good time boy’ in *Cage of*

*Gold* (1950). Such figures were seen as a threat to all the struggles of the war years and, crucially, to the success and integrity of post-war reconstruction: their ubiquitous presence on the cinema screen, then, would only highlight and intensify ideas about their corrupting influence on society. (See section on Austerity in Chapter 1).

The range of terms of reference in the above extracts - freshness; intelligence; think films as opposed to mere superficial entertainment; integrity; sincerity, and so on - exemplifies the mobilisation of the 'quality film' discourse in *PFR*. In combination, these criteria can, and must, produce films (and a 'filmic experience') which produces a 'levelling up' effect (in opposition to the 'levelling down' produced by 'popular'/Hollywood films). This is to be achieved by the combined effort of both critics and audiences; but 'the audience' is, precisely, the 'discriminating audience' so central to the educative function of the 'quality film'. For its part, film criticism must raise audience awareness, draw out its potential, encourage and nurture the audience's realisation of 'critical maturity'. Thus, film critics

"... are doing a first-class job now in making people critically aware of the content of films. Because of their efforts fewer and fewer people go to the pictures in a purely escapist mood. Audiences are beginning to want and enjoy better screen stories; they are beginning to *think* in the luxurious hypnotic dark of the cinemas. As a result, film makers are encouraged to make films about subjects which demand and deserve thought." (*PFR*, no. 6: 89-90, emphasis in the original)

There is then, an explicit relationship within the wider discursive formation of the 'quality film' between 'the audience' and 'the film', but what is clear also is that this

audience is not the cinema audience in its entirety, but rather that portion of the audience - self-elected, reflective, critical and literate - which reads *PFR*, and to whom *PFR* is addressed. This is also an audience that is constructed by the 'quality film', films that address audiences as critical and educated, and that nurture critical faculties in their viewers. In this sense the audience is homogenous and unified; it accords with a concept of the humanist subject that, as Ellis argues (1978: 20-1), underpins film criticism in the 1940s. But this humanist subject is also a masculine subject - rational, coherent, critical, discriminating - precisely the qualities valorised by the 'quality film' and 'produced' in its audience. The presentation of a feminine subjectivity is not possible here, 'the female audience' cannot be detected in overt references within a discourse that excludes the possibility of a response that is anything other than 'rational', 'serious' or 'intellectual'. And within this construction of the audience there is a fundamental disjunction: the 'quality film' audience is structured against an implied audience which is, in its engagement with the cinema, to be derided and ridiculed. This is precisely a feminine audience and it can be detected only rarely in *PFR*.

It is in a book review that *PFR*'s conception of 'the female audience' is articulated most clearly; by inference and as an opposing and 'damaging' element *within* 'the audience'. In her review of J.P. Mayer's *Sociology of Film* (1947), Kay Mander writes that:

'For the average reader, the normal man or woman who should be brought to think intelligently about their film-going and that of their children, the book will be of little value ... the consideration of adults and the cinema is documented by replies to a questionnaire in *The Picturegoer*. *The Picturegoer* is a *weekly fan magazine*, and prizes were offered for the best replies. The material obtained in this way is unlikely to come from the *truly "average"* cinema-going public, but rather from the *film-struck section*.' (*PFR*, no. 3: 93-4, my emphasis)

Two distinct audiences are suggested by this statement; each separate from and opposite to the other. The distinction between the 'truly *average* cinema-going public' and the 'film-struck section' is a distinction constantly, if not always explicitly, evoked in writing on the audience in *PFR*, and it constitutes a central contradiction. The 'truly *average*' audience is seen as the audience which is to be 'brought to think intelligently about their film-going'; in other words, it is the audience of the 'quality film', or, perhaps, the 'ideal audience'. Whilst the 'film-struck section' is the uncritical, un-demanding and, at least according to the criteria of such critical writing, under-educated: the readers of *Picturegoer*. Given that *PFR* occupies one possible position in post-war British culture that can be seen as allied with a 'negative consensus' (outlined in Chapter 2 in relation to Americanisation), then *Picturegoer* can be seen to occupy an opposing position - the 'serious journal' versus the 'fan magazine' with appropriate accompanying notions of the character and nature of the readership for each of these. A fundamental difference exists between these two audiences, and it is a difference which is somehow fixed by *PFR*'s discourse. The distinction between the two audiences can be seen as a structuring device, the

construction of binary opposites, each depending on the other for their meaning. At the same time, a further level of differentiation is in operation; the distinction between the 'mass audience' and the 'informed audience' that rests upon assumptions about class and the distinction between an educated middle-class audience and an uncritical working-class (or feminine) audience. The former is the audience embodied in the text of the 'quality film'; that is, it is the audience which the 'quality film' addresses and which it is the function of the 'quality film' to construct in the sense that it is seen as a medium of 'instruction' and 'enlightenment'. The latter is the un-reconstructed audience that is possibly beyond redemption. Moreover, when *PFR* talks of the audience as a force capable of instigating changes in film production, it is the former which is called into operation.<sup>5</sup> This audience is both the 'tuly *average*' cinema-goer and the articulate, critical, sophisticated reader of 'serious' or 'quality' films. In a sense, this audience is also the implied reader of *PFR* itself. Although this is not a category that is central to the concerns of this chapter, it is important to recognise that the *Review*, as well as the cinema with which it is concerned, had an implied reader - a reader who shared the values, beliefs and concerns of the *Review*, and who must be

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<sup>5</sup>For example: "...we want our *escapist* and our *realist* pictures, but whether we get them depends upon the public as well as producers who can hardly be blamed for studying box-office returns and gauging public tastes accordingly..." Pat Jackson, *PFR*, no. 3: 86 (my emphasis); the 'specialised cinema' and its audience, "performs a possibly slow, but certainly constant and cumulative work of improving public taste with regard to *all* films which come before it, and thus enables the commercial film-producer to take for granted a rising level of public taste..." Elizabeth M. Harris, *PFR*, no. 6: 85, emphasis in the original.

taken into account also as constituting part of the 'ideal audience' or the audience embodied in and implied by the 'quality film'.

Clearly there are problems here for both the construction of 'the audience' in *PFR* and for the 'quality film' discourse although the implication of each in the other binds them together. These are situated in the relationship between text and audience: between *PFR* and 'the audience' and between the 'quality film' and its audience. The audience is, at the same time, both passive and active; capable of influencing film production - if only in a negative or passive sense of effecting change by absenting itself<sup>6</sup> - but at the same time it only exists, is only evoked in so far as it *exists* for certain *forms* of film. Thus the audience is both powerful and powerless. In constructing it in this way, *PFR* presents an audience that is 'passive' in the sense that there is no indication of a belief in the ability of the audience to construct meaning from, or actively engage with film texts; this is an audience that is skilled in 'film appreciation' not in negotiating readings.

The *PFR* audience is a purely receptive audience, at its best simply acknowledging and appreciating what is presented in the 'quality film'. This is un-changeable regardless of age, class or gender differences. Moreover, through its presentation in this way, the audience is endowed with a universal nature that overrides or disregards

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<sup>6</sup>As Thomas Taig suggests: "the ninepennies can show their disapproval by staying away", *PFR*, no. 5: 33

the actual heterogeneity of the cinema audience.

There are exceptions. In "Woman and the Film" Elizabeth Arnot Robertson writes that:

"There are plenty of reasons for my being enormously interested in the cinema. As a citizen, aware that this is probably the most powerful agent there is to-day for forming standards of public taste and behaviour. As a private individual, wanting - definitely needing at times - the relief of laughter or of being moved by human circumstances which aren't my own. As a writer, because this is a most exciting and malleable art form: there seems, at present, to be no limit to its possibilities, the heights to which it can rise, the depths to which it can sink, the people it can reach and influence ... It is as a woman, though, not as a writer, citizen, etc., that I most easily get annoyed in the audience. Identifying myself for the moment with the heroine on the screen, as the female part of the good audience is supposed to do, I feel it is high time I was allowed to do something besides looking cute in order to inspire true love, of the undying variety, in the hero ... With certain glorious exceptions like *Brief Encounter*, blessedly *adult*, *truthful* and *contemporary*, everything to do with love in the cinema is early Victorian, adolescent at that." (*PFR*, no. 3: 32, my emphasis)

These assertions embody central elements of the discourse of the 'quality film': the terms 'adult, truthful and contemporary' are crucial in defining some of its criteria.

However, Arnot Robertson goes on to express clear dissatisfaction with the way she sees women represented on the screen, and the forms of identification offered by such representations (with the exception of the possibilities for identification offered by a 'quality film' such as *Brief Encounter*). She continues:

"Isn't it time the cinema grew up a bit about love? Not only about sexual love ... but also about maternal love. Any good, honest mother knows that the most pleasing sight in the world is the back-view of her children going off almost anywhere (so long as it's safe and they don't actively dislike it, in order that she shan't have to worry about them or even think of them at all) for several hours, in which she will not have to answer their questions or subordinate her



interests to theirs ...Has there ever been a film which reflected this prevalent feeling? No, screen mothers enjoy the company of their young twenty-four hours a day, God and the directors alone know how." (ibid.)

These statements do raise questions around the representation of sexuality and femininity, domesticity and motherhood, and these are clearly linked to what she sees as British film's inability (or refusal) to provide 'adequate' reflections of women's real lives and experiences, particularly at a time when women's lives had been dramatically affected by the war and its aftermath. Nevertheless, whilst she points to these as problematic areas of representation her argument relates these issues to the failure of film production to 'rise to' the standards set by a handful of 'quality films' and the effects of this on the contemporary audience. She equates lack of education (specifically of a generation of 'young soldiers', evacuated in the early days of the war and subsequently 'under-educated'), with what she sees as a youth audience's inability to engage with films on a critical level:

"The cinema as a major influence on all growing minds is here to stay. The young will see all the films they can, and some are bound to be *trash*. Surely the safer - the only effective - thing is to *arm them* as early as possible with *standards of taste* and *comparison* and *knowledge* of what the cinema can do at its most exhilarating" (PFR, no. 3: 35, my emphasis)

Here we have the invocation of a 'feminine' audience (by a woman critic), where the qualities of femininity - lack of critical awareness and so on - are attributed to an uneducated youth. The 'feminine' audience is derided and true comprehension is bound up with the idea of the 'quality film', invoking not only its form in *Brief Encounter* but also one of its major 'functions': education and illumination. What begins as an

expression of dissatisfaction with representations of women and with the unsatisfactory patterns of identification offered to women by the majority of films in terms of 'reality', develops into an argument for the 'quality film' and, more importantly, for the improved education (largely in relation to 'accepted' notions of 'good taste') of 'young men'. The important questions raised at the beginning of the piece have been subsumed under the discourse of the 'quality film' and the necessity to 'raise the standards' of the (feminine) audience, to enrol them in the 'fight' for a 'worthy' cinema. Her account of *Brief Encounter* as 'adult, truthful and contemporary' clearly articulates the humanist and universalist position of *PFR*, denying the possibility of different readings of the film from different sections of the audience. This is in direct contrast to the variety of readings that were made of the film at the time (see Chapter 4 for some questionnaire responses to *Brief Encounter*), where we can see that women's life experiences influenced their readings and identifications. For instance, questionnaire comments on *Brief Encounter* range from "I would hazard a guess at it being the first British film to handle a love story without being awkward and embarrassing. The characters were very authentic" (P. Adams); to "Thought the film very artificial and it got on my nerves" (P. Brandreth); "a bit too upper class for me at the time" (K. Snow); and 'I know it's a "classic" but Celia Johnson's accent was odious to me' (A. Macpherson). Primarily these relate to class differences between the audience and the characters and milieu of *Brief Encounter* and it is important to note this in relation to *PFR*'s place within a cultural commentary and criticism that

organised around class factions and articulated a range of anxieties about the shifting class relations of post-war Britain.

Sinclair Road catalogues what he sees as the influences of film on the audience:

‘...most obvious in *dress, habits of speech and behaviour*. Here the cult of the “star” has been most effective, particularly in the case of women. *Popular hair-styles* have been dictated in recent years far more by what has come out of the studios of Hollywood than from the Paris salons. The general level of *make-up and dress* has risen considerably ... and much of the general improvement in dress can be attributed to the film. On a deeper level the influence of the film has been equally far-reaching. It has provided a vehicle of escape which contemporary society, for good or ill, has apparently been in urgent need of. The typical Hollywood film has given people all over the world an opportunity to slip away from the disappointments and inadequacies of their own lives to move for an hour or more in a world of half-truths and happy endings ... The attitudes that the average Hollywood film has represented are not peculiar to America, nor are they peculiar to American films alone. They are merely a reflection of a world-wide desire to escape from contemporary realities.’ (*PFR*, no. 1: 63, my emphasis)

Primarily, the writer is concerned with the ‘influence’ of Hollywood films on the audience, and the influence of Hollywood production on national cinemas, but this attitude towards Hollywood is firmly situated within Americanisation debates, and related fears about the ‘effects’ of popular culture which so exercised contemporary cultural critics. More importantly, underlying his presentation of the Hollywood film is the notion of such films as ‘bad’, produced ‘cynically’ with no intention to ‘educate’ or ‘illuminate’ the audience, rather Hollywood provides ‘mere entertainment’, moreover, ‘escapist’ entertainment. The assertions in this extract embody the opposition ‘quality’/‘not-quality’, or ‘good’ versus ‘bad’, and the audience which is

implied by that opposition is similar to that represented by the distinction between the 'average cinema-goer' and the 'star-struck section'.

The audience is conceptualised as being both general and specific: general in that 'the audience' is seen as an undifferentiated mass ('people all over the world'), and specific in that those most 'affected' by the 'cult of the *star*' are (unproblematically) women; influenced in dress, make-up and hair-styles. Underlying this division is the equation of critical immaturity with femininity: thus, women are presented as easily influenced by surface appearance, they are slaves to fashion and they are utterly seduced by the appeals of Hollywood glamour embodied in the Hollywood film. The role of film in the construction of masculinity and male sexuality is never considered, whilst the construction of prescribed forms of femininity and female sexuality through cinema is taken as a given and what is particularly relevant here is the way that this presentation of the feminine audience coincides with E.A. Robertson's presentation of a male 'youth audience'. In both instances it is critical immaturity that distinguishes the audience yet, whereas the 'youth audience' can be 'saved' through education, the female audience is somehow presented as 'beyond redemption' - femininity is rooted in the body, in narcissistic engagements with, and emotional responses to, film. In Chapter 1, I discussed the ways that women questionnaire respondents 'used' the cinema to transform themselves in terms of how they constructed and presented an 'ideal image' of femininity. For those women at least, the process was productive, a

way of negotiating images of femininity; for Road, the process is seen as indicative of woman's narcissistic self-obsession and this disavows the imaginative possibilities in such acts of self-transformation.

The explicit gender division of the audience in the Sinclair Road essay is exceptional; even among the women critics who contributed to the *Review* 'human beings', whether they constitute the audience or the general population, were generally referred to as 'man' or 'mankind'. Although this may be typical of most writing of the period, it does indicate a denial of 'the female' as a separate subject position; particularly in *PFR*, there is an unwritten, implicit exclusion of women especially in relation to ideals of 'the audience' as 'critically mature' and 'intellectual'. However, things are more complicated than this: women as "real historical beings who cannot yet be defined outside of discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain" (de Lauretis, 1984: 5-6) are outside of *PFR*'s frame of reference, whilst a particular construction of femininity is central to *PFR*'s ideal audience. For de Lauretis, Western cultures construct 'fictional' characterisations of women within different discursive realms and these work to present woman as, on the one hand, "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses...(critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses)" and "the other-from-man (nature and Mother, the site of sexuality and masculine desire, sign and object of men's social exchange)" (ibid.: 5). Teresa de Lauretis uses the terms "woman" and *woman* respectively for each of these

distinctions and they are especially useful here since the ideal audience that *PFR* presents is one that may include **women** (real, historical beings) as critical, educated and serious film viewers but that, at the same time, codes the audience according to gender differentiations that preclude certain attributes that are equated with 'the feminine'. This implicit gender differentiation excludes what in de Lauretis's terms we can call "woman"/*woman* since she is discursively constructed as, precisely 'other' to the critical, sophisticated, intellectual, masculine humanist subject that *PFR*'s 'quality film' audience presupposes.

There is then, at the centre of *PFR*'s notion of 'the cinema audience' a fundamental tension that reveals at some level the contradictions and struggles within critical commentary to allow for the existence of an 'other' audience for films which, in and of itself problematises 'the quality film', since this exists and is only meaningful in so far as it is measured *against* the 'not-quality film' and its attendant audience. As I have already mentioned, there is another way of reading this determination to refuse the existence of another, equally valid audiencehood; with respect to anxieties about the changing class formation of post-war Britain, where anxieties about the unsophisticated feminine audience are a way of articulating anxieties about a working-class audience that is 'seduced by' the glamour and spectacle of popular, mass culture. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the construction of an appropriate womanliness is inseparable from its equation with certain class identities: femininity

has to be transformed and produced as an appropriate womanliness that accords with dominant (middle-class) notions of taste and value.

Finally, there is one further place in *PFR* where the female audience is present. In "That *Feminine Angle*" Catherine de la Roche takes issue with gender differentiated constructions of the audience which she sees as influencing film production policy. She attempts to deal with the 'problem' of how audiences in general, and female audiences in particular, are targeted and 'pre-determined' by film production policy, and the extent to which the reactions of an audience to such films may be influenced by particular types of film. She argues that:

'whatever their reactions, they are the reactions of a public conditioned over a period of years by standardised movies, advertising and journalism ... The supply ... is largely determined by speculation, and the executives who do the speculating ... are men. Aiming at the largest possible audiences, they are ... equally interested in both men and women as customers ... Nevertheless, backers pay extraordinary attention to this thing called '*feminine interest*', perhaps even more than to the things that are supposed to attract men, and one of the reasons for this is the widely held belief that *it is the citizen's wife who sets the tone for the average film*. The point at which their policy gets a thorough airing is when sales pressure is applied to a completed picture, and the trade press starts advising exhibitors of its selling value. This literature provides women with a first-rate opportunity to see themselves as men see them ...

Occasionally a film's appeal for men is made a specific selling-point, though showmen are usually reassured that it also has drawing power for women ... But the points of appeal for men are comparatively rarely singled out. The men who work out film policy know themselves well enough at least to realise that most of their fundamental motives, good and bad, are common to the whole of humanity ... It may occasionally be their policy to appeal to the baser instincts of humanity in general, but they never talk down to themselves as males, never treat themselves as an isolated species. And I have yet to hear of a "sly

masculine angle”.’ (*PFR*, no. 8: 25-6, my emphasis)<sup>7</sup>

The usefulness of these statements lies precisely in the fact that de la Roche problematises the assumptions which underpinned Sinclair Road’s analysis of the influence of film on women; she foregrounds the female audience and in doing so introduces a contradiction into the prevalent view of the audience which exists elsewhere in *PFR*. To some extent, she ‘sees through’ the construction of femininity and female sexuality which is offered to the audience generally and she indicates the simultaneous centrality and absence of dominant notions of femininity in perceptions of the cinema audience, as it is perceived by producers, exhibitors, advertisers and critics. She continues:

“*Feminine angles* ... crop up in startling profusion. Practically every other average movie is supposed to have them ... In a fascinating lecture given a few years ago, W.J. Speakman, an exhibitor, ascribed the success of *Now Voyager* to the fact that it was psycho-analysis written down for the masses, giving the illusion of high-browism, and classified it as a typical woman’s picture. Study advertising and trade press matter, and you will find that *sentimentality, lavish and facile effects, the melodramatic, extravagant, naively romantic and highly coloured, the flattering, trivial and phony* - these are the elements in pictures, whatever their overall qualities, that are supposed to draw women. Above all (and not surprisingly, since it is the opinion of men), woman’s chief and all-consuming interest is Men.” (*PFR*, no. 8: 27, my emphasis)

What is significant is that de la Roche identifies the assumptions about gender that underpin the perceived appeal of the ‘sentimental’, ‘melodramatic’ and the ‘romantic’

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<sup>7</sup>With respect to the emphasised comment in this extract, it is interesting to compare this with Mark Abrams’ comment in Chapter 2 (cited from Winship) that it is women who control matters of taste in domestic consumption and the presentation of ‘the home’.



and in mentioning Speakman's comments on *Now Voyager*, she identifies the gendering of the 'uneducated' and 'low-brow' as feminine (this is more pronounced in *Picturegoer* as discussed below). Yet however this view may mitigate against the dominant presentation of a female audience in its refusal of the notion of femininity that supports it (and it is important to recognise this) there is still a sense in which the relationship between film and viewer recalls that of appreciation rather than negotiation. As with E.A. Robertson's call for 'truthful' and 'authentic' representations of women, de la Roche calls for films that are 'more adequate' as representations of women's experiences:

"Will those ludicrous feminine angles go out of fashion and the star system start encouraging actresses of true individuality - the only kind that can achieve universal significance - instead of the all-purpose nonentities? ... So far, at all events, the real story of modern womanhood has not begun to be told. And it cannot be told except as part of the story of modern times." (*PFR*, no. 8: 34)

*PFR* then, provides us with an elusive but identifiable female audience; this can be understood in relation to dominant cultural constructions of femininity and, as the previous chapter demonstrated, contemporaneous representations of women also reflect these.

I now want to discuss *Picturegoer* in order to flesh out this notion of the female audience in another, quite different publication.

### **Picturegoer**

The first issue of *Picturegoer* came out in May 1931, the last in April 1960 and any

attempt to account for the construction of the female cinema audience in *Picturegoer* must note that due to the long duration of the magazine, considerable internal shifts and changes occurred throughout the period under consideration, most notably in the second half of the 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

*Picturegoer* displays an explicitly popular or even populist approach to writing about film, claiming, in opposition to *PFR*'s pedagogical agenda, that:

“*Picturegoer* ... is concerned with affairs of the film business only in so far as they involve the entertainment of the picturegoing public”. (January 10, 1953)

Moreover, whilst *PFR* can be situated comfortably amongst *Sight and Sound*, *Films and Filming* and journals such as *Sequence*, *Picturegoer* seems to occupy a sort of ‘no-man’s-land’ between these publications and more Hollywood orientated magazines like *Pictureshow*, *Film Review* and *Photoplay*. Although *PFR* characterises *Picturegoer* as a “weekly fan Magazine”, I would argue that this is not an adequate categorisation: *Picturegoer* did offer its readers more than features on stars, covering issues that included: the latest film releases, accounts of events at British studios and reports from Hollywood, at least in the years immediately following the war.

*Picturegoer* reached a far wider audience than *PFR*,<sup>9</sup> yet its readership was not so

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<sup>8</sup>For a brief historical summary of *Picturegoer*, and a survey of the final ten years of the magazine's publication, see: Bob Baker, 1985: 206-9.

<sup>9</sup>As Baker points out: “Precise [circulation] figures have proved impossible to come by...However, a writer who was associated with the magazine thinks that the circulation about 1953 may have been over 500,000; and that as the decade drew to a

easily identifiable as *PFR*'s: the advertising content of the magazine, for instance suggests that its readership was female, but the general contents suggest a far less narrowly defined audience and items on the letters page tend to be spread evenly between men and women.

Significantly, *Picturegoer* evoked a 'family audience': Britain's typical 'picturegoing family' was announced in the November 28, 1953 issue and their views were inserted periodically into *Picturegoer*'s pages. For example, on December 11, the opinions of the White family were appended to a feature in which Dennis Myers and Margaret Hinxman argued over the relative merits of their favourite stars; an editorial in October 1952 carried a feature on the 'X' Certificate and Rank's refusal to exhibit 'X' films in its cinemas because this would erode its family audience; and a further editorial in July 1953 criticised the showing of mixed certificate films for its disruption of the cinema's traditional family support. However

'By 1954 ... Mum and Dad were defecting from both picturegoing and *Picturegoer*, and the paper had begun to react by accommodating itself to a more youthful audience ... Symptomatically, there's a "Teen-Spot" ... The fact that

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close it was dipping below the 100,000 mark", op. cit.: 208.

As well as *Picturegoer*, Oldhams also published *Woman*, *Woman's Realm*, *Woman's Illustrated* and *Ideal Home*. As Baker suggests, this may offer a possible explanation for *Picturegoer*'s advertising content, aimed exclusively at women.

J.P. Mayer, whose *British Cinemas and Their Audiences* (1948), was based on replies to an appeal for opinions and experiences placed in *Picturegoer* (as was his *Sociology of Film*, 1943), suggests that *Picturegoer* "reached about one million readers" at the initiation of his appeals, the first of which appeared on February 3, 1945, the second on May 26 of the same year. See *British Cinemas and Their Audiences*: 154.

the teenagers who paid to see the films couldn't be persuaded to cough up for *Picturegoer* is only partly explained by the decision to follow old habits and aim primarily at a female audience. The other half of the story is that the *Picturegoer* team came nowhere near defining that audience or its requirements.' (Baker, 1985: 207-8)

While *Picturegoer* may display some confusion about its readership, it is less ambivalent about the cinema audience. *Picturegoer's* cinema audience can be detected through looking at the way it sustains a critique against what is seen as 'bad' cinema; two editorials, from December 6, 1947 and February 14, 1948 respectively, provide typical examples of this:

'The pendulum is swinging, and it is moving in the direction of comedy. This in itself should be a good thing ... But there's a snag in it. There's too much pushing of the pendulum. It is swinging way over because of the cry that has gone up for "*escapist*" films. Now what is an "*escapist*" film? No one can really tell you. Presumably it is a film that *requires no thought* on your part, and makes you forget the trying times in which we live ... We agree that through insufficient planning, British producers have chosen too many gloomy subjects, but our condemnation of a picture should not be because it deals with a weighty theme and makes us think, but because it is a *bad picture* ... *The only thing we want to escape from is a bad film*. That's what we would label "*escapist*" films.' (my emphasis)

'We may claim to have been the first to point out many months ago that the British screen was being drenched in *gloom* and that the misery would continue for a good time ... We pointed out that what we need is a mixed diet ... Hollywood is more skilful in preparing screenfare ... American producers do not overload the plate with one type of product ... Now, all of a sudden, the newspapers of our country have discovered what the picturegoers have known for many months, that British pictures have specialized too strongly in *gloom*. The newspaper writers ... have demanded comedies ... And we see the result and spectacle of British film producers panicking to make funny pictures. It is all very wonderful in theory but we are convinced that this lack of planning will have dire results. It won't be long before we are given a diet of *sticky marshmallow*, mostly *gooey and formless*. We will sigh for something *substantial* into which to put our teeth, *even if it is gloomy*. We print this as a

solemn warning to our producers, with the knowledge that the majority of our readers approve.” (my emphasis)

*Picturegoer*'s 'bad film'/'good film' opposition is a continuous feature in the magazine until the early- to mid-fifties, although this is grounded in notions of entertainment (the criterion of 'bad' films being that cinemagoers do not enjoy them) rather than within the terms set out in the 'quality film' discourse operative in *PFR*. Nevertheless, *Picturegoer* does hover on the margins of the 'quality film' discourse in that the 'bad' film for *Picturegoer* is represented as a 'diet of sticky marshmallow...gooey and formless'. The above excerpts also reveal the magazine's concern with films of 'substance' and 'authenticity' and *Picturegoer* does valorise films such as *Millions Like Us*, *Brief Encounter*, *Henry V*, *Dead of Night*, *Passport to Pimlico*, *The Way to the Stars*.<sup>10</sup> The distinctions that are made in each of these two publications mirror the evaluations on cultural products that were allied with alternative sides of the 'high/low' culture divide and that reflect the dominance of a modernist paradigm (see Huyssen, above). Thus, both publications characterise films in the following ways: good films have a coherence in visual style, bad films are fragmented; good films deal with contemporary subjects in a 'realistic' way, bad films are 'historical', they are excessive, sensationalist and escapist; good films show

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<sup>10</sup>Compare for instance, "We Can Still Learn", M.L. Henry, September 14, 1946 and "In Praise of Ourselves", Peter J. Dyer, March 2, 1946, wherein the authors praise the same films that appear in Roger Manvell's list of 'good films' in *PFR*, no. 6, cited above.

authentic characters with emotional depth, bad films have shallow characters and deal with trivial reactions and emotional responses, and so on. However, although this does suggest some commonality between *Picturegoer* and *PFR* in relation to particular conceptions of the nature of the 'good/bad' film opposition, and the relationship between audience and film, *Picturegoer* displays an awareness of a diversity in the audience (and thus in audience/text relations) which is not apparent in *PFR*. Although it must be noted that *Picturegoer* itself had a more diverse readership than did *PFR*, there is a difference in *Picturegoer*'s construction of the audience and this lies in the recognition of diverse subjectivities rather than the assumption of a universal (humanist) subjectivity. This is not to argue that the writing in *Picturegoer* expresses a recognition of a wide range of possible subject positions for 'the audience', but it does acknowledge 'alternatives'. This is expressed most clearly in relation to class. In "Are British Films Too Good?", June 7, 1947 the writer (John Stapleton) almost despairs of the typical (and typically 'gloomy') film-fare being shown in provincial cinemas and argues that such films do not (cannot) appeal to provincial (working-class) audiences:

'Slowly the caption came into view - "J. Arthur Rank presents" - From behind came a muffled yawn and a peculiar remark, "Oh dear, now we are going to be educated"...Are the products of the Rank Organisation too highbrow? Can this charge be laid against British films in general? Whatever critics may write, word of mouth sells seats in the provincial houses.'

Although the class assumptions expressed by Stapleton are problematic, the article does express an awareness of a diversity of viewing experiences (and pleasures) across audiences. For instance, as the article goes on to suggest, *Brief Encounter* was

generally less successful (in terms of box-office receipts) in northern industrial areas (that is, amongst working-class audiences) and in small, local cinemas than in the cities and in the south of the country. Such a view supports and is supported by the questionnaire comments about *Brief Encounter* cited above.

*Picturegoer*'s recognition of a more diverse audience allows for consideration of the female audience as a differentiated element in a way that *PFR* does not (with the notable exceptions of Elizabeth Arnot Robertson and Catherine de la Roche), although it must be noted that the audience in *Picturegoer* is always, primarily, a consuming audience. For *Picturegoer* the audience is not critical, educated and serious in the *PFR* sense, which also indicates the different class position of the *Picturegoer* readership and of its conception of the cinema audience.

### **"Do Women Make Good Filmgoers?"<sup>11</sup>**

When Inman Race poses the question: 'Do women make good filmgoers?' the answer is already there, purely in its utterance. Similarly, 'Do men make good filmgoers?' is not a question that needs to be asked, but for different reasons: while the male or 'masculine' audience is unproblematic (it is pre-supposed in most, if not all, writing about 'the audience' and is assumed to be knowable and understandable), the 'female

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<sup>11</sup>This is the title of an article that appeared in *Picturegoer* on August 2, 1947, by Inman Race and is discussed below.

audience' is not-known, not-understood, but is nevertheless a constant feature and underlying structure in writing about the audience in general.

Initial readings of *Picturegoer* suggested that this magazine might conceive a valid female audiencehood consisting of real social subjects (women), a counterpoint to *PFR*'s 'feminine' audience construction implicit as the 'other' to the undifferentiated, but select, audience for the 'quality film'. It appeared to be the case that *Picturegoer* conceptualised its readership as female: its advertising was aimed at women, there were elements in it (besides the advertising content) which one might have expected to find in 'women's magazines' (for instance, Ann Bourn's "Beauty Parlour"), and regular features written by and addressed to women such as Kate Quinlan's series "I Know What I Like". With this in mind (despite the problems entailed in the acceptance of a generalised notion of 'women's interests') it seemed reasonable to suppose that for *Picturegoer*, women would be less problematic as a cinema audience.

However, it was apparent that the female cinema audience was a 'problem' for *Picturegoer* as well as for *PFR*. Whilst this may be symptomatic in part of *Picturegoer*'s mixed sense of its readership, it may equally be due to the fact that there was simply no place available from which to address the interests of the 'female audience' in a popular film magazine. This is not to suggest that simply because a film magazine has an implied female readership then that same readership, as cinemagoers, must be unproblematically addressed by it, but that this is true for two such divergent



publications can be seen as evidence to support the contention that 'the female cinema audience' is discursively constructed within a specific set of cultural, ideological and social conventions. This places *Picturegoer* in a particularly contradictory position in respect of the way it addressed its readership as female, yet constructed the cinema audience as 'masculine'.

Two examples will be used here to illustrate how *Picturegoer* characterises the female audience as split between a feminine (bad), and a 'thinking woman' (masculine) audience. The following extracts are quoted at length.

"The other day my wife chose the film for our weekly cinema patronage. An ordinary film, but with a love theme, and how the fair sex wallowed in it. On the way out one heard feminine comments about how lovely it had been. Just an example of the average woman not being a good picturegoer. If the producer had been compelled to make films for the mere man, and the *thinking* woman, he could have made the film more pungent, more satisfying and more vital ... So many women dote on celluloid love. I fancy that they enter a cinema with the idea of putting themselves in the position of the feminine star, and so the screen lover makes love to *them*. Otherwise how can so many stars rank as great when they are disliked by so many men? Yes, judging by some of the films woman loves screen love, and on that basis she must put herself in the place of the star who is being loved. That is, nearly every one of the female section has gone to see the film for the love interest alone.

Many demand something more. They constitute a menace because they fancy themselves at being the crooner's girl friend ... If only the crooner cravers would stay away from the cinema for a whole year there would be the most terrific change ever known since they became audible!

Thank heaven for a wife who does not rave about crooners! ... to be in a shop and hear the younger end talk about some crooner of the moment, to hear the bobbysoxers chant the charms of a movie moaner, makes a fellow realize that when a woman's heart can be reached with tonsil torturing the screen is in a bad way ... In any case, apart from the film angle, women make bad film patrons. Woman is the **noisy sex**, and probably the only sex that cannot enjoy

the films unless they are accompanied by the **slither** of ice cream down the throat, the **rustle** of chocolate wrappings, the **suction of orange juice and pulp**, the **crunch** of biscuits, and the **cascading** of tea.

Myself, I think that if exhibitors had a no eating or drinking rule in the cinemas half the female side of the population would stay away on those grounds alone ... What a lovely film patronage world it would be if the cinema had no eating or drinking, no smoothy stars for the females to fancy as lovers, no crooners, no child stars. Just the film world for men...

And what an empty world it would be for us, after all. Women make bad picturegoers, but they are nice to have at a fellow's side. Yet the hand that metaphorically rocks the film baby's cradle rules the film world, and has been responsible for giving mere man some of the most boring evenings in the cinema. **Women do not make for good filmgoing.** (*Picturegoer*, August 2, 1947, italics in the original, other emphasis mine)<sup>12</sup>

This sense of the female audience is not dissimilar to *PFR*'s (especially *PFR*'s 'film-struck section') but what distinguishes this article from *Picturegoer* is that it articulates 'the feminine' as the 'natural', the 'emotional', the 'trivial' in such an explicit way (it overtly expresses what *PFR* does not, or more likely cannot, and it does so with excessive language).<sup>13</sup> The feminine audience, the public or mass that threatens to run amok and de-value the 'true' cinematic experience, does not know how to *behave* appropriately. But more than this, the feminine is pathologised: the use of terms that evoke bodily functions and biological processes equates the feminine

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<sup>12</sup>Compare these statements on the vacuity of female cinema going ("I fancy that they...put themselves in the position of the feminine star, and so the screen lover makes love to *them*") with Elizabeth Arnot Robertson's essay in which she situates herself as *a part of* the female audience. Moreover, she asserts that 'identification with the screen heroine' is an activity that is 'supposed' to be participated in by 'the female part of the good audience'.

<sup>13</sup>In this respect, a useful comparison can be made between this extract and the extract cited from Sinclair Road (*PFR*, no. 1: 63) cited above.

with 'the natural', with a set of uncontrollable libidinal impulses that the writer both fears and is disgusted by: woman as filmgoer wallows in the (narcissistic) process of identifying with the screen heroine and, what is more, her (critical) abandon is compounded by oral indulgence. The baseness of the feminine is clearly opposed to the sophistication and rationality of the masculine.

This denunciation of the female picturegoer is loosely equivalent to that embodied in the 'quality film' discourse and it operates within the same conceptual framework, referring to the deleterious effects of the female audience on film production. That is, the writer *blames* the 'fair sex' for *wallowing* in a 'romantic film', for *doting* on *celluloid love* and, by implication, for influencing the production of such films; without them the films produced and exhibited would be more *pungent*, *vital* and *satisfying* (terms which certainly would not be out of place in *PFR*). But something more complex is going on here that is related to the ways in which the female audience is presented within a set of already existant notions about femininity that are allied with definitions of 'the feminine'. What is particularly striking here is the way that this extract reveals what might be called the gendering of the 'low-brow', 'child-like' and un-educated audience as feminine. Furthermore, this allows for a clarification of the overlap between gender and class; the 'types' of films Race is discussing accord with the products of 'popular cinema' - historical adventures, musicals, melodramas, 'women's films' - and the presentation of the audience of such films as female equates

a particular type of cultural product with an audience whose responses are purely 'emotional' and 'libidinal'. Previously, I outlined de Lauretis's 'three categories' and these are relevant here also; because Race's use of terms is so explicit, we can identify how they are constructed and how they operate within the article. For instance, Race's wife 'represents' a 'real historical being', a 'real woman' granted a level of critical engagement and exercising rational (masculine) judgement. This much is clear since she did not 'like' the film either, she shared her husband's despair at both the film and the experience of watching it:

"While we do differ a bit about various films, here was an occasion where we both seemed rather of the same opinion. You see, neither of us likes a film where the love interest sticks out with the delicacy of a bull putting his head over a hedge." (ibid.)

However, the separation between concretely situated individuals and 'the other from man' or woman as a 'fictional construct' is not a clear-cut one. It is particularly apparent in the above extract that the feminine is, at the same time, 'not male', and a product of a critical discourse that gains its meaning from more widely situated frameworks that equate the feminine with 'the natural', the biological and thus with uncontrollable libidinal impulses. It is here perhaps, that we can see most clearly the articulation of 'the public' as opposed to 'the audience', for in this essay on women filmgoers we can see that here is a place where

"the rational monotone of the critic breaks, fails, falters...the points where the criticism is incomprehensible are the keys to its comprehension. The public, like the unconscious, is present only where it ceases..." (Clark, 1973: 12)

In the light of the discussions in earlier chapters which have argued that dominant representations of womanliness in this period place femininity in a particular relationship to consumption, Andreas Huyssens's essay "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" (1988) is again particularly relevant. A complex of negative cultural meanings cluster around the figure of woman, who is "positioned as reader of inferior literature - subjective and passive" (1988: 45). In both *PFR* and *Picturegoer* it is possible to identify a similar conception of femininity, where the feminine (specifically women but also other 'problematic' audiences such as 'youth') is constructed as anti-modernist, and is allied with 'mass culture' in ways that place women in a particular relationship to ideas about the corrupting influence of consumerism and Americanisation. This is particularly relevant to discussions in the following chapter on *Yield to the Night* which argue that the figure of Diana Dors in the film provokes an anxious reaction to a femininity that was 'uncontrollable', that over-identified with the products of mass culture, and that 'over-consumed'. Thus, for Race women are *seduced* by the glamour and narcissistic identification processes offered by the 'star system', a product of Hollywood; and this, the article also suggests, pre-disposes women to the lure of 'the romance', another mass cultural form associated with 'the feminine' and subject to derision. Similarly, women participate in an 'uncritical' involvement with 'crooners' (undoubtedly American), and the references to oral consumption imply an indiscriminate (even 'driven') absorption of the products of (mass) culture. Here the feminine becomes a sign for voracious

consumerism; of food, of pleasure and of 'masculinity' - the sensuality of her oral indulgence is followed by the 'crunching' of biscuits but, more prosaically, 'the female audience' is seen as responsible for destroying men's control over and enjoyment of the cinema.

The following extract from an article titled "Story or Star?" by John Stapleton, presents the 'female audience' from a somewhat different perspective although this is no less prescriptive in the ways it presents 'the feminine'.

**'... Women always find greater interest in stars while men concern themselves with stories ...** When picturegoers have nothing but the bill board to guide them, the lady governs her choice by the star, the man wants to know about the story ... Ask any woman what films she remembers best of those she has seen in the past five years, and you will find that, if she does not spontaneously mention half a dozen star's names, she will readily admit that when trying to recollect, mind pictures of personalities rather than titles occur to her first.

Then listen, if you can, to the conversation in any Service mess or factory canteen where men gather and the talk turns to films.

"Oh, it's a war picture, or a cowboy film, a rattling good mystery or one of those slushy love things." Never a mention, or very rarely, of the actors and actresses.

The question is not one of the relative intelligence of the sexes but rather of their different mental outlook. Psychology provides an interesting explanation. Most of us live rather drab and mundane lives. We would feel worried or even frightened if anything happened to disturb that routine or threaten our security. Yet we all have deeply rooted subconscious desires for pleasure, power or love.

Our intelligence tells us these wishes cannot be fully satisfied. There is a conflict, in fact, between the reality world of our conscious senses and the "wish world" of our unconscious mind.

As children, we relieved the tension of this conflict by day dreams and fantasies. As adults we use the escape mechanism of fiction and the films. Whether we know it or not, we *identify* ourselves with the characters in stories. We enjoy the films because there we see people solving difficulties,

experiencing danger, loving and being loved. The opening sequence reminds us of our own problems, and as the story unfolds, this mechanism of identification lulls and soothes the unconscious mind in to the belief that our strivings will also have a happy ending.

**These facts are true for both men and women. The difference in their attitudes lies in the fact that in the main, men desire power.** The dynamic urge is to control events and to dominate humanity in the mass...**With women it is quite the reverse. However much they deny it, their happiness is found in being dominated or controlled. Biologically it is their nature.**

Nature has modelled the eternal feminine upon this principle. Any woman will admit that to be loved is far more important than loving, being possessed more valuable than possessing.

Is it to be wondered at that a woman with such instincts concerns herself with personalities?...**Women like stars who portray conquest through consideration, men who dominate or women who show her new ways of the art of love.**

Men may rave about Grable's legs or Bacall's sultry smile, but few would see a picture for those considerations alone. Yet women will queue for hours to see Boyer, or Bogart, whatever the story may be about.' (August 4, 1945, italics in the original, other emphasis mine)

A number of elements in the discursive construction of the female audience are identifiable here. The confident assertion that woman's picture-going activities are determined by a 'biological' or 'natural' desire to be dominated, or by her need constantly to 'learn' new ways of being successful in the 'art of lovemaking' reveals a far more wide-spread tendency. On the one hand, this proposes that 'the feminine' can be understood through quasi-psychological investigation whilst, on the other hand, it dismisses women's desires and pleasures, placing them in the realm of fantasy, the irrational and the subjective rather than in the (male) world of 'the real', the objective and the rational. Furthermore, these are 'dictated' by the biological tendency of the feminine towards maternalism and nurturing. Clearly, this strategy evokes a number of

themes already discussed, but in addition, the writer articulates a far more deeply rooted contention: that power relations and the position of women within them, are unrelated to systems of domination but are situated, easily and unproblematically, in the biological determinants that shape the construction of subjectivity.

This extract reveals both the explicit relation between discursive construction and power/knowledge, and offers the possibility to see clearly some of the mechanisms whereby discourses make 'natural' those observations and 'beliefs' which are indeed the product of a range of strategic choices and which are informed by specific historical and ideological pre-suppositions. For instance, the association of femininity with the biological 'fact' of the desire (and need) to be dominated and controlled is proposed overtly in relation to women's 'subconscious desires' but is presented also as a statement of fact which is not contested (or contest-able). This is counterposed to the assertion that it is 'men's' biological and psychic determination that they desire control and domination. What is going on here is not the assertion of 'truths' but the articulation of the operations of discursive construction (of both femininity and masculinity, or of both woman and man) within the parameters of the discourse; the discourse reveals the conditions within which it is formed and within which it operates. These conditions are not internal to discourse itself but, in this instance, the utterances of the discourse expose the range of assumptions and pre-suppositions which inform it, the operations of power/knowledge within it and the fictions created



Illustration 20



by it.

Finally, I want to present some extracts from the letters page of *Picturegoer* which provided the opportunity for readers to express their views on a range of issues (here it has the advantage over *PFR*). Some respond directly to “Do Women Make Good Filmgoers?” and contest Race’s assertions, others reiterate the conception of the female audience outlined above. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that although referencing only two articles from *Picturegoer* was selective, the representation of the female audience characterised in them is not an aberration; it has a much wider currency among its male and, significantly, its female readers.

“I admire Inman Race for telling the world, in no uncertain tones, what he thinks of us women, and he will probably need an administrative staff to open the hysterical and threatening letters he will no doubt receive. But *please* Mr. Race, we’re not all tarred with the same brush ... I like a good comedy, an interesting murder, and sometimes a love story, but I think I’m speaking for quite a few members of my own sex, when I say, that I *never* wish myself in the heroine’s place.” (August 30, 1947, emphasis in the original)

‘Mr. Race complains the majority of women filmgoers prefer “romance” to anything else. Has he forgotten the truth so well phrased years ago -  
“Man’s love is of man’s life a thing apart;  
‘Tis woman’s whole existence.”

This biological urge has always existed and will, no doubt, continue to do so; it is a necessity for the continuation ... of the race. In the realm of fiction, most women prefer love stories to thrillers, character studies or adventure yarns, but no one condemns them for this. Of course, there is the other side of the picture. I know plenty of male filmgoers who are bored stiff by an “intellectual” film, and who wallow in musicals, with Technicolored, half-naked “beauties”, and plenty of eye and leg appeal!’ (August 30, 1947)

“... what ... is going to be done about the powerful female element which, as has been proved time and again, forms the great majority of cinema

audiences?" (February 28, 1948)

'As your correspondent K.H. (above) pointed out... it is very true that the "powerful female element" has proved time and time again to form the bulk of cinema audiences.

This is the tragedy of films today, for *women* with their *undiscerning, sadistic* and *hero-worshipping* outlook have reduced films to the status of the paper-covered novelette. While they continue to pay up their husband's well-earned one-and-ninepennies, cinemas will continue to show the *sickly celluloid sherbert* that has kept nearly two-thirds of the general public from becoming regular filmgoers.

Husbands, *keep your wives and daughters from the pictures and thus help bring worthwhile films to our cinema.*' (April 10, 1948, my emphasis)

These letters are interesting because they demonstrate the widespread circulation of dominant perceptions of femininity; where the first letter does contest Race's presentation of women filmgoers this is done in order to propose a notion of women audience members that accords with the *idea* of filmgoing as an activity which involves *critical engagement* - in this way, the writer may find herself allied with de la Roche or Robertson's call for more 'realistic' or 'representative' images of women's experiences. The other three letters, all written by men, reveal a level of revulsion of 'the feminine' that make both Race's and Stapleton's assertions seem models of discretion; blaming women for the production of 'poor' films which may 'entertain' in so far as they provide 'escapism', but which do not 'illuminate'.

Read in the light of the discussion presented in earlier chapters, the construction of the 'female audience' reveals an audience that is produced *in opposition to* an ideal audience which responds to 'authentic', 'serious' and 'realistic' films. That this ideal

audience is masculine is quite clear with reference to the terms which validate it. The 'quality film' audience did not disperse when *PFR* ceased writing about it, rather it continued to exist as an ideal audience against which films were tested and to which critics addressed their comments. Regardless of the status of film within culture, the work of *PFR* - continued in publications like *Sight and Sound* and *Films and Filming* - to create an educated, critical and thoughtful film-going public helped to establish a dominant tradition in Britain of film criticism as film appreciation, validating both particular types of films and particular responses to them. Within this framework, the 'un-educated', 'uncritical' audience, whose favoured film-fare consisted of 'bad' films, represented both a 'threat' to established notions of appropriate cultural consumption and a threat to the 'virility' and 'authenticity' of national film production. Both film criticism and British films themselves (with notable exceptions that operated outside of the 'realist tradition') displaced onto 'the feminine' anxieties about the corruption of the national culture and character by an 'unhealthy' interest in popular films that did not reflect 'appropriate' Britishness.

Hence, in *Dance Hall*, *Turn the Key Softly* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* we saw femininity represented within rigid definitions of 'appropriate' forms of behaviour and presentation, and a newly formed aspirant working-class femininity having to struggle hardest and relinquish most, in order to become 'proper'. Anxieties about 'appropriate consumption' and 'proper womanliness' prevailed in Britain in the late-1940s to the

Illustration 21

ASSOCIATED BRITISH PRESENTS

# DIANA DORS YVONNE MITCHELL YIELD TO THE NIGHT

WITH MICHAEL CRAIG · GEOFFREY KEEN · ATHENE SEYLER

A KENNETH HARPER PRODUCTION SCREENPLAY BY JOHN GRESSWELL  
AND JOAN HENRY Based on the Book by Joan Henry  
PRODUCED BY KENNETH HARPER DIRECTED BY J. LEE THOMSON



WOULD YOU  
HANG  
MARY HILTON?

DISTRIBUTION BY ASSOCIATED BRITISH PATHÉ

mid-1950s, as I discussed in relation to both Affluence and Americanisation and in relation to the pronatalist discourse outlined in Chapter 3. In *Yield to the Night*, the focus of the next chapter, 'the feminine' is 'out of control'; a working-class woman follows her desire to the extent that she steps outside of the bounds of acceptable behaviour. That this character was played by an actress renowned for her conspicuous consumption of popular culture can go some way to accounting for the critical reception of the film. This analysis of the formation of the female audience within and in accordance with prevailing social and cultural constructions of femininity may go a little further to providing 'an answer' to the question of how and why *Yield to the Night* was received in the ways that it was.

Illustration 22



Illustration 23



E55.9  
PR.9.106



## CHAPTER SIX: *Yield to the Night* - Consumption, Femininity and the Limits of Appropriate Womanliness

“This so-called affluent society is an ugly society still. It is a vulgar society. It is a meretricious society. It is a society in which priorities have gone all wrong.” (Aneurin Bevan, Labour Party Conference, 1959, cited in Foot, 1985: 642.)

I now want to turn to a consideration of *Yield to the Night* in the light of the discussion presented in the previous chapters. I shall argue that this film represents the over-determination of a (increasingly contradictory) femininity that, in the latter part of the period, was subjected to progressively determined attempts to construct appropriate behaviours, roles and presentations. That this movement was progressive, and linked to the socio-economic and cultural formation of the period, has been demonstrated in preceding chapters. In particular, Chapter 3 showed how women's increased independence through employment (however slight), their increased spending power as holders of the family purse-strings, and their newly enfranchised participation in the developing consumer society of 1950s Britain, provoked a heightened uneasiness about the nature of modern femininity, and a proliferation of discursive and ideological attempts to secure ‘appropriate womanliness’. These attempted to fill the gap between women's subjective experience of their lives in Affluent Britain and the construction of their roles as mothers and homemakers.

*Yield to the Night* can be seen as a particularly problematic film that struggles with

the *problem* of 1950s femininity; this is not a femininity that has *become* glamorous, it is a femininity that is founded on glamour, consumption and display. Importantly, *Yield to the Night* is structured around struggles between competing class-specific femininities. Whilst the film focuses on the figure of Mary Hilton (Diana Dors) and judges her to have transgressed the boundaries of appropriate working-class womanliness, it is significant that her crime was the murder of a wealthy, louche, upper-class woman who, in her own way, also transgressed appropriate womanliness. The figure of Lucy Carpenter (Hilton's victim), appears only briefly in the film and in fragments - she is defined through her appearance (fur coat, jewellery, her 'beautiful legs and shoes' as Mary at one point comments), and through her possessions (a mews flat, an expensive car, the numerous, expensively packaged parcels she is taking out of her car when Mary shoots her, Illustration 20). This is a woman who has the means to consume on a grand scale, but she has no morals - she has 'stolen', Mary's boyfriend with her money and her 'loose ways',<sup>1</sup> she has no respect for 'correct' ways of behaving; she has failed to conform to 'proper' ways of being a bourgeois woman, unlike Monica in *Turn the Key Softly* who 'stands in for' a morally and ethically 'correct' bourgeois womanliness. *Yield to the Night* presents the confrontation between classed femininities that, in different ways and with different inflections, have *become*

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<sup>1</sup>Lucy Carpenter is a marginalised figure in the film in terms of her actual physical presence, but she is represented as an arrogant 'good time girl', unconcerned for the consequences of her actions. It is her rejection of Jim Lancaster (Michael Craig), Mary believes, that precipitated his suicide and significantly, his suicide note is addressed to Lucy, not to Mary.

improper, that do not conform to dominant notions of appropriate roles and behaviours.

Thus, *Yield to the Night* struggles over how to define sets of 'proper' balances between over- and under-consumption, between activity and passivity, between authenticity and artifice, between realism and fantasy, Americanisation and Britishness, the state and the individual and finally, between women and men. The struggles within the film were also those within British culture and society at this time, focused on the ways that femininity was bound up with Affluence and Americanisation. *Yield to the Night* itself fragments and isolates femininity, it scrutinises a femininity founded upon the glamour of consumption. This is a femininity that has 'adhered' to ideology - aspiration and upward social mobility through consumption, the 'ideology of affluence' - but that has gone too far, for consumption is not 'tasteful' and 'discrete' as it should be in its very British way, but it has become Americanised - flashy, cheap and ostentatious. Through the figure of Diana Dors, this film punishes woman for expressing desire, for inappropriately consuming the products of the new mass culture, and for presenting herself as a glamorous object of display. Read in relation to context, it is possible to see how the film reflects and re-articulates a preferred femininity. Read in relation to the questionnaire responses, it is possible to see how the film and its female star offered women cinemagoers identifications and pleasures that were in direct opposition to what might be called 'dominant readings' of the film (liberal, humanist, anti-capital punishment). Read in relation to the discursive construction

of the female audience, it is possible to see how the film could be characterised as melodramatic, 'over-emotional' and thus how it could be devalued. Read in relation to critical discourse and writing about the film itself, it is possible to see how the anxieties and tensions represented by Britain's biggest female star playing a role against the grain of her usual glamorous and spectacular parts are expressed through the use of particular language; it is precisely here that criticism *is* incomprehensible, where critical commentary cannot account for femininity and where the unconscious (the fear, here, of women, of the working-classes and of female sexuality) reveals itself. The 'meanings' of *Yield to the Night* are not to be found in the film itself, or in the critical discourses that surrounded it, or in the society from which it was produced, or in the memories of the women who watched it on its first release, but are traceable in each of these different elements and in their interrelations.

It is in this respect that I submit the following analysis of *Yield to the Night* and present it as an example of a British film that represents cumulative discursive attempts to mould and construct femininity within the boundaries of patriarchal notions of appropriate behaviour and roles for women. *Yield to the Night* represents the limit case for this thesis: it is a film that attempts to circumscribe a 1950s Affluent femininity that is uncontainable because of its excessive nature, and it embodies a moment at which the representational devices used to construct and present femininity cannot, in a sense, sustain an increasingly problematic image. And it is the image of Dors in the film that represents the source of a *problem* that

revolves around the tensions in the construction and presentation of femininity in relation to Affluence and Americanisation.

*Yield to the Night* (Illustration 21) was first exhibited at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1956,<sup>2</sup> and first screened in London the following month. Dilys Powell's comments in the *Sunday Times* (May 6, 1956) serve well to indicate the overall style and the theme of the film:

"It was in a respectful but slightly stunned silence that the audience watched *Yield to the Night*...the story is about a convicted murderess...Most of the action takes place in prison, and much of it in the condemned cell. There are no concessions to entertainment...Continental audiences do not expect such absence of compromise from the British."

One of the most striking aspects of the film was not simply its subject matter but also the stylistic peculiarities of the director's treatment of this subject matter. J.

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<sup>2</sup>This may confer a certain 'art' status on the film that may suggest it did not conform to more usual conceptions of popular cinema. However, the range and extent of both critical comments and the questionnaire responses to the film also suggest that it was seen as very much part of popular cinema at this time and, importantly, it was watched as such.

In addition, the way the film was marketed situates it within the parameters of popular cinema. In this respect, I would draw attention to the 'showmanship contest' run by *Kinematograph Weekly* for cinema managers who staged various promotional campaigns to publicise the film. As reported in *Kinematograph Weekly* (August 23, October 11, November 1 and December 13), these were organised largely around the issue of capital punishment and included Diana Dors lookalike contests, street parades and foyer displays that depicted Diana Dors with a hangman's noose and accompanied by the caption: 'Would you hang Mary Hilton?' Cinema managers also carried out polls on capital punishment, asking cinema patrons to vote on the 'Mary Hilton question' after viewing the film. These campaigns, reflected in the advertising poster for the film (illustration 21), suggest that not only was *Yield to the Night* seen as a 'box-office draw', but that it was a film that somehow 'connected with' its historical moment of production and exhibition in particular ways (see below for more detail on this).

Illustration 24



Lee Thompson directed both *Woman in a Dressing Gown* and *Yield to the Night* and whilst it is not my intention to enter into discussion of Lee Thompson as an auteur, it is worth noting that the particular style of *Yield to the Night* (and *Woman in a Dressing Gown*) owes much to his directorial input, especially in relation to the use of camera angles and framing devices. The comments made previously in respect of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* (Chapter 4) are relevant to *Yield to the Night* also: the characters in this film, Mary Hilton in particular, are consistently shot and framed within and against signifiers of separation, confinement and oppression. For instance, the camera frequently frames Mary Hilton through the bars at the head of her bed in the prison cell (Illustration 22), or from unlikely angles when she and the wardens walk in the prison compound (Illustration 23) and, as she sits at a table on the eve before her execution, Mary is alternately made visible and then obscured by the swinging pendulum of a clock behind which the camera is placed. The use of these devices is common to both of Lee Thompson's films discussed here, and it has been suggested that this directorial style is related to that of Sirkian melodrama (see Hill, 1986: 98-9), in so far as such techniques are subversive, creating a disjunction between the subject matter of the film and its cinematic style which simultaneously draws the audience into patterns of identification with characters and subject matter whilst distancing them from these identificatory processes (see Willemsen, 1972/3).

It has been argued that such films both expose and contain the contradictions inherent in bourgeois ideology and that they can be understood as 'progressive'

in so far as they fail to contain fully the complexities and contradictions of dominant ideological notions. There are two problems here, however: first, as Hill points out (1986: 99-100), Lee Thompson's use of cinematic techniques of distanciation is not restricted to scenes that focus upon elements of disruption, such as those containing Georgie and Jim in *Woman in a Dressing Gown*. Rather, the entire films are saturated with these devices, so that all characters and scenarios are represented as similarly problematic and contradictory. And, as Hill points out with respect to *Woman in a Dressing Gown*:

‘The style adopted by the film’s ending...would seem conspicuously less than a positive endorsement...rather than provoking contentment the implicit repression is recognised by the film’s choice of a final shot...Far from being positive, the conclusion would seem to imply enclosure, even internment, with the audience critically distanced from the film’s apparently “happy ending” by the deployment of a device already saturated with negative connotations...’ (1986: 100)

Similarly, in *Yield to the Night*, the ubiquity of distanciation devices and the potential disjunction offered by these is undercut by the way that the film’s closure so comprehensively refuses any possibility for ‘contentment’: as Mary Hilton walks slowly into the execution cell, the prison padre following her, she is first made faceless, becoming simply a silhouette, before being blacked out - her form blanks out all light and any other figure or object within the frame before the total blackout of the final shot. As in the closure of *Woman in a Dressing Gown* where we see Amy standing behind the ‘bars’ created by the bookshelves, any potential fissures created by the stylistic techniques employed produce containment and hopelessness rather than a subversive space within which the contradictions of



ideology can be exposed and explored. This is also important since in cinematic terms it functions to close off certain possibilities for subversive or alternative identifications for the female audience to whom the film is addressed. Although, as we shall see below, the audience at the time was not fully 'excluded' by these techniques, instead they express a sense of disappointment with the resolution of the film and an empathy for the main characters.

The second difficulty with the 'subversive potential' thesis resides in what Laura Mulvey has characterised as the intersection of gender and genre (see Mulvey in Gledhill (ed.), 1987: 75-9). As she argues:

"Ideological contradiction is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes. No ideology can even pretend to totality: it must provide an outlet for its own inconsistencies. This is the function of 50s melodrama. It works by touching on sensitive areas of sexual repression and frustration; its excitement comes from conflict not between enemies but between people tied by blood or love." (75)

In this formulation, the radical or critical possibility of melodrama is disarmed by the idea that since melodrama and women's films consistently focus on domestic situations, sexual relations and conflict, they do not reveal ideological conflict *per se*, but they 'use' such conflicts as ways of diverting 'problems' within patriarchal culture into conflicts within the private or personal sphere. Mulvey distinguishes between 'family melodramas' that "examine tensions in the family, and between sex and generations; here, although women play a central part, their point of view is not analysed and does not initiate the action" (76), and what can adequately be characterised as 'women's films' (as a sub-set of melodrama); these are "coloured

by a female protagonist's dominating point of view which acts as a source of identification" (ibid.). This is a useful distinction since *Woman in a Dressing Gown* can be understood in these terms as a 'family melodrama' which, in Mulvey's terms, has a 'masculine' point of view and utilises the conflicts within family life to explore the instability and contradiction presented to masculinity by domesticity (in this case focused on but not necessarily initiated by Amy). The closure of the film then becomes an ideological containment and reinstatement of masculinity within the realms of a domesticity that has become recognised by Jim as both inevitable and comforting - although, as mentioned above, this is severely undermined by the framing of the final shots in the film and the resolution is different for Amy than it is for Jim. The 'woman's picture' though, does not encompass the same resolutions and containments. However compromised it may be, the 'happy ending' of the 'family melodrama' can be successful since its main function is to smooth over ideological contradictions for masculinity; for the 'woman's picture' though

"It is as though the fact of having a female point of view dominating the narrative produces an excess which precludes satisfaction. If the melodrama offers a fantasy escape for the identifying women in the audience, the illusion is so strongly marked by recognisable, real and familiar traps that the escape is closer to a daydream than a fairy story. The few Hollywood films made with a female audience in mind evoke contradictions rather than reconciliation, with the alternative to mute surrender to society's overt pressures lying in defeat by its unconscious laws." (Mulvey, op. cit.: 79).

This is vital to the following discussion of *Yield to the Night* since it proposes that for female audiences, and for representations of femininity, the 'woman's picture' does not resolve but explores contradictions; the closure of such films can then be

seen as prescriptive rather than descriptive or constructive, narrowing down possible readings for the female audience. For instance, it has been shown that the narrative closure of both *Dance Hall* and *Brief Encounter* presents models for the construction of appropriate femininity and feminine roles and behaviour; alternatively, *Turn the Key Softly* subsumes alternative femininities under the model of a newly determined and differently accentuated Affluent femininity whilst, as I shall demonstrate below, *Yield to the Night* offers no viable alternative construction of femininity in its closure: in this case femininity is yet to be determined.

However, the characterisation of *Yield to the Night* in this way is not straightforward. Although in many ways the film can be seen as a 'woman's film' through its concentration on the personal realm of emotion, relationships and female experience, it is also the case that the representation of Mary Hilton would not appear to be a representation *for* a female audience in the sense that it offers positive or alternative representations, yet at the same time, it may be the case that the film is directed towards a female audience. I shall consider audience responses to the film below, here I want to indicate the problematic nature of *Yield to the Night* in terms of its status as a specific *type* of film (the woman's film) through a brief consideration of the character of Mary Hilton.

Mary Hilton is an independent female character in so far as her social life is organised outside of traditional family structures; at the beginning of the film she

lives with her husband Fred, but she does not have a life with him as his wife, thus from the outset she is outside 'appropriate' womanliness. She works in an ostentatious and stylish shop that is frequented by wealthy and elegant women (this is where she first encounters Lucy Carpenter). The shop décor is sleek, polished and highly designed in accordance with 1950s fashion - spare and simple, but here overlaid by a brightness that suggests an Americanised gloss. The shop is light, airy and bright; the use of a bleached mise-en-scène and the prevalence of white is a recurring trope throughout the film. Mary Hilton is therefore presented from the beginning as a 'thoroughly modern woman' who works and who lives a life outside of normalised domesticity - unlike the characters in *Dance Hall*, Mary does not work in order to be able to play, her work is an extension of and an expression of her glamour and modernity (Illustration 24).

In this way she is a figure suffused with expectation and aspiration, expressed through her desire for Jim Lancaster - a somewhat marginalised and bohemian character, not unlike the figure of Alec in *Dance Hall* (Canadian/Irish, a failed teacher who wants to be a writer and who plays the piano in drinking clubs). Yet, despite the presentation of her as independent and the recurrent use of her first person narrative as a guide through the flash-backs constructing the story of *Yield to the Night* Mary, Hilton is not allowed any filmic independence - it may be her story, told by her and about her life and death, but she is seen through the eyes of institutions and of men. It is the institution that frames and contains her - the prison, the Home Office, the court - and she is motivated by and made sense of

through her relationships with the male characters in the film. These characters are in a sense not characters at all as they have no depth and we know little about them as individuals, but they have a vital function, as representatives of different aspects of the discourses that have produced Affluent femininity: Jim in relation to domesticity and a means of escape from a failed marriage into a relationship structured by love and desire; Fred in relation to a solid and respectable 'working-classness', reliable and safe but dull, un-modernised, and untouched by Affluence; and the male figures in the prison as representative of both a medical establishment and discourse that pathologises women,<sup>3</sup> and a Religious discourse that presents appropriate moral and ethical models of femininity. The prison doctor for instance, is constantly examining Mary, prescribing sleeping-pills, attending to a blister on her foot since she must be kept in good-health, advising her to wear her cloak in case she catch a cold, whilst the padre ministers to Mary's spiritual needs and 'lectures' her on the importance of repentance, forgiveness and solace in Religious Belief.

The family, marriage, medicine, religion and the judiciary; all mediate the character of Mary Hilton and undermine her presentation as an independent, modern and autonomous woman. Thus these figures and what they represent create a tension between the content of the film (the story of Mary Hilton), the narrative structure (first person voice over and flash-back) and the representation of the

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<sup>3</sup>See Mary Ann Doane, 1987: 38-96 for an analysis of the medicalisation of femininity in the woman's film of the 1940s.

female protagonist (subject to both a range of discursive pressures and consistently shot and framed through mediating objects and from unlikely camera angles). This tension has been identified by Mulvey in terms of how films that present a 'female point of view' narrative produce 'an excess that precludes satisfaction' (ibid.: 79).

This is apparent in *Yield to the Night* through the disjunction between the conventions and mechanisms of dominant, narrative cinema, and the presentation of femininity within such structures (patriarchal and unconscious) for a female audience. This, Mary Ann Doane suggests, is the result of cinema that attempts, through the 'woman's film', to explore female desire and subjectivity:

'The woman's film is in many respects formally no different from other instances of the classic Hollywood cinema; its narrative structure and conventions reiterate many of the factors which have contributed to a theorization of the cinema spectator largely in terms of masculine psychical mechanisms. Nevertheless, because the woman's film insistently and sometimes obsessively attempts to trace the contours of female subjectivity and desire within the traditional forms and conventions of Hollywood narrative - forms which cannot sustain such an exploration - certain contradictions within patriarchal ideology become more apparent. This makes the films particularly valuable for a feminist analysis of the way in which the "woman's story" is told. The formal resistances to the elaboration of female subjectivity produce perturbations and contradictions within the narrative economy.' (1987: 13)

The dissonance created by the existence of competing discourses in *Yield to the Night* illustrates what Colin McCabe has called the 'hierarchy of discourses' that operate in the 'classic realist text' (1981: 216-35). Here this relates to the domination of Mary Hilton's story by the 'stories' of male representatives and the way the camera is used as a source of Mary's 'subjection'. But there is another point that is pertinent here which relates to the argument concerning the

conventions of cinema, to the specificities of British cinema, and to the consequences for representations of women and constructions of femininity. Much writing and discussion about melodrama and 'women's pictures' has concentrated on Hollywood production and has thus taken place in relation to a cinema that has a different history and context from that of British film. One of the most important contributions to the cinematic style of British film (including those discussed here) is the tradition from which it developed and which became dominant: 1930s documentary. This has been outlined above but it is relevant here since it introduces a further aspect to the discussion of the particular ways in which 'women's pictures' and the themes of melodrama are represented in British films. The demands of the realist mode impose particular constraints on the representation and construction of femininity and this has specific consequences when we consider *Yield to the Night* in terms of the relationship between form and content - the imposition of a unified and coherent 'truth' onto the emotional excess and instability represented by its subject matter. This is also relevant in so far as the notion of the 'quality film' prevailed in British film production and criticism (even if in later years it was evoked primarily as a measure of what British Cinema used to be in its 'golden age'). Furthermore, as has been shown in Chapter 5, the construction of the 'quality film' is organised around the presentation of such films *as* realist, but this also has consequences for concepts of the audience - an audience that is contrary to the assumed female audience addressed by the 'woman's film'. This introduces a range of competing formulations, however these are in a sense

overlaid by the specificities of British Cinema's domination by realist forms and this further undermines the apparent potential of melodramatic themes to provide a subversive or critical space for female audiences particularly.

In her discussion of the film *Mandy* (1952), Pam Cook (1986: 355-61) identifies it as a 'transitional film', produced at a time of cultural, social and ideological flux by a studio (Ealing) that was itself in a transitional state - from bouyancy in the mid- to late-1940s, to decline throughout the 1950s. She argues that *Mandy* is a film riven by contradictions, attempting to "mediate between post-war ideologies of femininity and the family, particularly those of the mother and child" (358). The point of introducing Cook's discussion is that she identifies one way that the film attempts to deal with contradiction: through the use of a particular (and particularly British) cinematic style:

'The appeal to a notion of documentary social realism capitalises on an emerging genre of "social problem" pictures. The social realist mode also connotes the realm of the public. This appeal to "quality" confers respectability on the melodramatic/women's picture aspect of the film - its blatant appeal to the private, personal realm of the emotions in order to capture an audience and manipulate its responses. (This was a direction often taken by mainstream British cinema in the 50s - see the combination of melodrama and social realism in *Yield to the Night*, 1956, and *Woman in a Dressing Gown*, 1957, for example.) The tension between public and private, the shifting boundaries between them, is a major theme in *Mandy*, intersecting with the tension between past and future and worked through in terms of different institutional spaces....Ultimately, these tensions are resolved by finding a new balance between the conflicting terms, and a space which lies somewhere between the basic oppositions, representing a compromise.' (Cook, 1986: 357, insert in original.)

This raises points relevant to *Yield to the Night*: the melding together of 'social realist' and melodramatic concerns that simultaneously instigates a consideration



of the relationship between public and private and the tension between them, and evokes the criteria of 'quality film' so comprehensively embodied in the writings contained in *PFR*. *Yield to the Night* is particularly interesting in this respect since it is a film that addresses a real source of concern in Britain at this time - capital punishment. On July 13, 1955 Ruth Ellis was the last woman to be hanged in Britain; in June 1956 *Yield to the Night* was first exhibited in London. Whilst the film was not a film *about* Ruth Ellis (it was not made to represent 'the Ruth Ellis Story'), it was a film that represented the last months of a woman condemned to death for a murder that was both 'calculated' and 'spontaneous'. The release of *Yield to the Night* within a year of Ellis's execution allowed parallels to be made across the film and the 'real world', but this also meant that *Yield to the Night* can be seen to have had quite precise conditions of reception in the collective shock and guilt evoked by Ellis's execution. Ellis was linked to the character of Hilton and the film was received as a commentary on capital punishment, on the de-humanising effects of incarceration and on the 'immorality' of state sanctioned murder. The point is not that there was an easy or direct link between the two - the film was based on a book first published in 1954, and was in production at the time of the trial - but that the historical moment of *Yield to the Night's* first exhibition coincided with a climate of unease and anxiety about the ways that society had 'dealt with' a 'deviant' femininity. This makes the following critical comments interesting since the film was reported as having an 'immediacy' and relevance:

"In an elementary way the film is certainly distressing. It could hardly fail to be considering the ritual it describes. It has also been directed by Mr. J.

Lee Thompson with a sort of rough journalistic decency..." (*Financial Times*, June 18, 1956)

"I wish all those people who support hanging would see this film. Because, for the first time, it is you - the public - who are in the condemned cell." (*Daily Herald*, June 15, 1956)

"This study of a young murderess awaiting execution in prison is remarkable in its *integrity*, *balance* and grim refusal to alleviate its distresses to box-office tastes. As a comment upon capital punishment it cuts straight through with admirable purpose." (*Films and Filming*, July 1956, my emphasis.)

*Yield to the Night* was seen to contain elements of the presentation and construction of the 'quality film' and was therefore categorised as a realist film; for instance, the terms 'integrity' and 'balance' (*Films and Filming*) and the comments of the *Financial Times* reviewer - 'rough journalistic decency' and the allusion to its unrelenting approach - could have appeared in the *PFR* over ten years earlier. In terms of its subject matter and its approach to this subject matter, *Yield to the Night* conforms to notions of 'quality British Cinema' and is positioned within a history of British films that is rooted in Realism (see also the comments above on *Dance Hall*). This is perhaps more firmly secured by the fact that the film is seen to be rooted in contemporary events (contemporaneity was also a privileged marker of the 'quality film'). This is useful in that it helps to clarify the categorisation of the film in critical terms, yet it also reveals a slippage which is central to *Yield to the Night's* place in contemporary film culture and its reception by women. The evocation of the film in terms of its exploration of an identifiable, and topical 'problem' is undercut by the use of particular cinematographic techniques which introduce an expressionist element undermining the 'realism' of the film.

The reviews offer a useful bridge between a consideration of *Yield to the Night* in terms of its qualities and status as a film, and the readings of the film by contemporary viewers - critics and audiences. These readings reveal particular contradictions that are rooted in the historical context and in the discursive construction of femininity in Affluence.

However, it is also relevant that the apparent immediacy and 'social relevance' of *Yield to the Night* shaped responses to it and particularly since its contemporaneity was more a fortuitous (or unfortunate) 'accident' of timing than an intentional and cynical exploitation of the Ellis trial and execution. In terms of the slippage between 'film' and 'reality', *Yield to the Night* was variously acclaimed for dealing unequivocally with its subject matter, and criticised for exploiting the recent trial and execution of Ruth Ellis. Capital punishment was a subject of much public interest and debate in Britain in 1955 and 1956; not only was the execution of Ruth Ellis fresh in the minds of the public but 1955 also saw the introduction in the House of Commons of the Silverman Bill to end hanging, in 1956 the Commons gave its support to the Bill in a free vote, and magazines and newspapers frequently printed opinion polls on the subject. *Yield to the Night* was thus exhibited in a climate that was primed for the subject matter it dealt with and in one sense, it is evident that the conventionality of *Yield to the Night* (albeit tempered by directorial quirkiness) did, as Cook suggests of *Mandy*, lend the film a legitimacy and credibility it might otherwise not have gained. Yet at the same time this presented critics with considerable difficulties and its female audience with almost

insuperable problems of identification. I shall discuss the issue of the film's credibility first, and then consider the problems this raised; these are related to the differences between form and content, and the persona of the film's 'star'.

The extracts cited above from the *Financial Times*, the *Daily Herald* and *Films and Filming* provide examples of critical comments on *Yield to the Night* that praise the film for its realist approach to its subject. The following extracts exemplify the majority of questionnaire responses to the film and these too comment on the film's close depiction of current events:

"I made a special effort to go and see this - I had followed the Ruth Ellis story in the newspapers and I wanted to see and understand the background to it. Diana Dors was marvellous, she wasn't afraid to be seen unglamorous and she really acted - I began to admire her and like her in this film." (D. Wright)

"This was the one where Diana Dors showed that she could act. She surprised me in this, and everyone else too, I think. It was quite a moving film especially as I first saw it not long after Ruth Ellis was executed." (M. Porteus)

"...Remember all the discussion - influenced me in becoming anti-capital punishment." (P. Wills)

'This was when I changed my mind about Diana Dors - thought she was excellent in this "Ruth Ellis" part.' (D. Hayles)

"Diana Dors gave a fine performance. This was related with cool documentary thoroughness and without any hysterical undertones, very impressive." (J. Mason)

It is certainly the case that *Yield to the Night* was understood to have an overt political message and that for the majority of reviewers and audience members this was supported by the style of the film. For instance, the final extract (J. Mason)

from the selection of questionnaire responses, clearly identifies the film with criteria that would not have been out of place in a discussion of a film like *In Which We Serve* or *Brief Encounter* whilst the other respondents apparently 'used' the film in diverse ways that either aided them in their negotiation of the capital punishment issue or provided them with information on a 'real' event. Newspaper critics also wrote about the film in relation to the ways it foregrounded a particular political position:

"*Yield to the Night* is balanced so precariously on neutrality that no one need fear that they are being lectured at. Whatever prejudices you have on the matter of hanging should be confirmed...The bulk of the film is purely a detailed, factual account of how a condemned woman is prepared for death. It is this stoical, hypocritical etiquette of execution that will give the anti-hangers their grimmest satisfaction. For there is something degrading and humiliating about the macabre process by which society self-righteously commits its own brand of murder...My chief objection, then, to *Yield to the Night* is that it is a film of resignation rather than protest. We leave it moved by death and not by drama." (*Sunday Express*, May 17, 1956.)

"...The film is commendable chiefly for the way in which it stresses what most people realise, whether or not in favour of hanging: that the real punishment lies in the period of waiting, of not daring to hope, yet not daring to despair..." (*Daily Mail*, June 15, 1956)

It is important to register the way in which audience and critics made sense of the film, but such a discussion can become bogged down in debating the success or failure of individual texts at representing 'reality; in noting the 'preferred', 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' readings contained in them;<sup>4</sup> or in an argument about the range of different strategies readers employ. However, it is a different aspect of

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<sup>4</sup>See Stuart Hall, 1980a: 128-38.

both the reviews and the questionnaire responses to *Yield to the Night* that is of particular interest here: that which focuses on Diana Dors.

The potential instabilities of *Yield to the Night, as a film* have thus far been discussed in terms of content working against form; this is important for a consideration of the representation of femininity in the film, and given the tensions that are present in its structure. Yet the central, most disruptive element in the film is to be found in the female protagonist Mary Hilton, not in the sense of her presentation as a character and her role in the narrative but because of *who* represents her.

An overwhelming majority of questionnaire responses to *Yield to the Night* comment upon the film as *a Diana Dors film*. In addition, it was *Yield to the Night* (and *Woman in a Dressing Gown*) that provoked most responses and comments from the questionnaire. Part of the reason for this may be that these films were first released towards the end of the 1950s and that they were therefore the 'most recent' films on the questionnaire. However, it is also the case that these films are not representative of the films valorised by *PFR* or *Picturegoer* - they are not, at least in the most strict terms, 'quality films' although they may have employed preferred realist techniques - nor are *Yield to the Night* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* films that exist in revisionist or feminist film histories (for instance Gainsborough melodramas, Powell & Pressburger productions, or the 'true' products of the 'quality film' era such as *Brief Encounter* or *The Seventh Veil*).

Rather, they are what might be called 'forgotten' or hidden films of British Cinema from this period. Similarly, whilst films such as *Brief Encounter* and *The Seventh Veil* are remembered on the questionnaire with clarity and in some detail, they are commented upon as if through over forty years of film history - a 'classic British film', 'this one is famous' - whereas *Yield to the Night* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* elicit what appear to be less mediated responses which seem to suggest that the films held a particular resonance, often related to specific images or 'frozen moments' within them. For *Yield to the Night* it is the *image* of Dors (and *not* Mary Hilton) that receives most attention. An extended selection of representative extracts from the questionnaire comments will exemplify this and it is important to subsequent arguments about the role of Diana Dors as Mary Hilton and the contradictions she embodied. It is this disjunction between the 'star' persona and this specific film image of Diana Dors that is especially important in relation to an analysis of dominant constructions and notions of femininity in the latter part of the 1950s.

"This was the only film where I rated Diana Dors. Her acting ability came as a wonderful surprise and I only wish it could have been shown in more films." (M. Brassett)

"A great performance from Diana Dors, no make-up - sheer brilliance." (S. Darby)

"A really superb film. Diana Dors gave a beautiful performance. I always thought it a shame she was never given more chances of this kind. She was far more than a glamorous blonde." (U. Edwards)

"The best film Diana Dors ever made, what a change from her usual glamorous roles. She always played and looked the part that every woman wanted to be. She made our British films that bit special. We always wished

we could be as sexy.” (J. Goodison)

‘I was drawn by the subject matter to this film and was interested to see Diana Dors in, as I recall, her first “unglamorous” role. She was very good and I realised that the girl had been wasted in most roles.’ (J. Hughes)

“Dear Diana Dors as the condemned woman waiting to be hung. It was such a shock to see our blonde, busty, glamorous Diana in a drab uniform and no make up. Can’t even remember why she was there, did she kill her lover? and we never believed right to the end that she’d die. It seemed to cause many people to think again about hanging, especially women. Maybe that was the beginning of the end?” (R. McWiggan)

“Diana Dors did not convince in a serious acting part - having had too much publicity as a fat, blond floozie whose private life left much to be desired.” (E. Sewell)

‘Everybody rushed to see “our Di” do her thing. I thought she was good. Press very grudging.’ (M. Sullivan)

“Her performance lasted in my memory for the rest of her life.” (Z. Wilson)

“This I remember as if I saw it yesterday. Until then Diana Dors had a tattered reputation, but this film certainly brought her back to the top. Her acting was superb and showed she could do it given the right script.” (K. Woodward)

‘...we couldn’t wait to see Diana Dors in her first dramatic role, which had been much publicised. How would she look with no make up? She proved in this film what a good dramatic actress she could be, and wasn’t just a “dumb blonde”. An excellent British film of its time.’ (M. Barker)

“I was impressed (and surprised) by Diana Dors’ de-glamourised performance in this film.” (V. Blackwood)

“What can you say about this film. Dors was great she proved she was more than a face and a body.” (R. Frost)

“Excellent - realised what a splendid actress Diana Dors was. I went around singing her praises after this film.” (J. Harries)

“Diana Dors’ best film, de-glamourised - and superb acting.” (S. Iveson)

“...I did not enjoy it at all. Very depressing although if it was Diana Dors in



the main role, I thought the acting was excellent and at least it featured a believable woman for a change.” (P. Kinsella)

“Thought Diana Dors was very plucky to act without make up, it’s the best acting she ever did and most realistic.” (J. MacDonell)

There are several aspects of these comments that are particularly interesting and relevant here. Overwhelmingly and strikingly, *Yield to the Night* was remembered as a ‘Diana Dors film’, this can be made sense of in respect of three aspects of the film: first, the topicality of its subject matter (discussed above); second, the prominence of Dors as a British ‘film star’ who was, as some of the comments make clear, famous (and infamous) for her exploits and her image as glamorous and sexy. In 1953 Dors and her husband, Dennis Gittins, were charged with burglary and Dors’ ‘confessions about her private life’ were printed in the *News of the World*; in 1954, questions were raised in the House of Commons about her earnings and Income Tax payments, and a publication of pin-up pictures of her, *Diana Dors in 3-D*, was removed from circulation pending an indecency trial; on 22 January, 1955 *Picture Post* printed a ‘random selection of news items relating to Miss Dors’ and at the 1955 Venice Film Festival she publicised *Yield to the Night* by sailing down a Venetian canal in a mink bikini.<sup>5</sup> In terms of her public visibility *Yield to the Night* could probably not have come at a more fortuitous time. The third aspect of the film that is relevant here cuts across the public image and popularity of Dors: the constant reference to her appearance. If there is one single

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<sup>5</sup>See Christine Geraghty’s essay on Diana Dors in Charles Barr (ed.) 1986: 341-5.

element in the film that constitutes its 'instability' it is the representation of Dors in an unglamorous role; this runs counter to the audience's previous knowledge of her across a range of other films as well as their extra-filmic knowledge of her. This will be discussed below in detail, here it is relevant to the questionnaire comments I want to focus on first: the 'revelation' of Dors acting ability.

I would suggest that just as the social realist *style* of *Yield to the Night* is important in terms of the idea of making respectable the feminine focus of the film, Dors' role in the film legitimates her in the same way. Coupled with her 'un-made-up', 'unglamorous' appearance, the 'seriousness' of the film established Dors as a 'real actress' who could be valourised *because of* her acting rather than *in spite of* it.

This was clearly important for the women whose comments are cited above since it seems to be a way in which these particular members of the female audience could confer respectability on their fandom. 'Everybody rushed to see "our Di" do her thing' (M. Sullivan) expresses the popularity of Dors and the audience's investment in and enjoyment of her, whilst the following two comments illustrate the surprise but pleasure offered by the possibility of being able to express open respect and affection for her: "A really superb film. Diana Dors gave a beautiful performance...She was far more than a glamorous blonde" (U. Edwards); "...She proved in this film what a good dramatic actress she could be, and wasn't just a dumb blonde" (M. Barker). These responses are, I would argue, class specific, since the 'relief' provided by this confirmation of respectability onto a hitherto trivialised and marginalised identification is not one that the majority of critics

expressed. It is also related to the legitimization of a working-class femininity<sup>6</sup> in a way hitherto disavowed in British film - as I shall demonstrate, first in relation to critical comments and then in the context of a more general analysis of the film. As Richard Whitehall in *Films and Filming* noted:

“The working girl tied to her factory bench, going through the endless monotony of mass production, recognises in Dors the working girl...who achieved all the status-symbols” (January 1963).

And, I would add, found in *Yield to the Night* a vehicle through which that identification could be credited with a degree of acceptability.

In addition, this cuts across the construction of the female audience as presented in Chapter 4. *Yield to the Night* represents a ‘woman’s film’, made ‘appropriate’ through the formal qualities it was seen to express (‘journalistic decency’, ‘integrity’), its subject matter used to ‘educate’ and ‘illuminate’ the audience. As Lee Thompson stated: “In every film I do I hold onto something, some social problem...The cinema is a mass medium for world audiences - there’s nothing wrong with a Bob Hope/Bing Crosby picture. They’re not trying to show any

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<sup>6</sup>Dors claims that she was not from a working-class background; her father had been an Army Captain during the First World War and she herself characterised her background thus: “...by the time I was born, my parents had made the climb from working-class to *upper* middle-class (a notch even worse than *lower* middle-class)”, 1981: 12. The accuracy of this self-characterisation is not the issue, what is important and what is clear from the questionnaire respondents is that she was *identified as* working-class and was believed to have been ‘one of us’ (cf. above, M. Sullivan: ‘Everyone rushed to see “*our Di*” do her thing’). In addition Dors expressed her ‘solidarity’ with and admiration for ‘the working-classes’: “I have a high regard for the aristocracy, but I also respect the working-classes. Their ignorance may frighten me, but I have always admired the genuine, rough, down-to-earth way they live and think.” (ibid.: 11-2)

social problem, but I personally must.” (*Films and Filming*, April 1963). The intention of the director and the readings made of the film by audience members had a correspondence of sorts with *PFR*’s aspirations for ‘quality film’, yet the film was a ‘woman’s picture’, addressed to a female audience and its main character was a star who signified all that was trivial, ‘flighty’ and glamorous; the worst expression of Affluence and Americanised culture. All of this is possible, I believe, because of the ‘unglamorous’ appearance of the film’s main character. There is a peculiar Britishness in the way that Mary Hilton is valorised *because* she is made plain, stripped of make-up and represented as lacking in physical affectation - stripped of the signifiers of Affluence and Americanisation with which Dors was otherwise so strongly associated that she signified them too, the ‘making plain’ of Mary Hilton is doubly effective.

In her book *Blackout*, Antonia Lant discusses the ways that critics focused on the appearance of Laura in *Brief Encounter* and used this as a way of signalling the unique Britishness of the film (Lant, 1991: 189- 92). I would like to provide examples of these comments here since they offer an illuminating contrast to later discussion about the way that Dors’ appearance was commented on by critics and the consequences this has for thinking about the construction of femininity in Affluence.

“The greatest departure from an American film in handling this story is the casting of the two principle characters. Neither of them is particularly handsome or buried under romantic appeal” [wrote one critic]; Celia Johnson is “portrayed as sufficiently attractive to win our sympathy, but not so glamorous as to be incredible” [wrote another] ...“without manufactured

glamor or conventional good looks [Celia Johnson], magnificently portrays the wife and mother"...she has "a clammy hairdo, little makeup, [and] looks overworked." (see Lant: 190-1)

As Lant observes, American reviewers in particular were struck by the contrast in terms of appearance and glamour between Celia Johnson and Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (191- 2). In Lant's analysis, it is Johnson's lack of glamour and artifice that make her the quintessential and most 'effective' heroine of British realism. It is not my intention to use these parallels to argue for the establishment of *Yield to the Night* as a 'quality film', however the comments relating to the physical appearance of these two characters are interesting for a comparative study of the ways that femininity was discursively constructed in relation to visual images at the beginning and the end of the period under consideration. For Laura Jeesson, the absence of glamour is a 'natural' and integral part of her construction within notions of an appropriate middle-class femininity. For Mary Hilton, the absence of glamour is necessary but for quite different reasons and with a distinctly different outcome. The deconstruction of an Affluent working-class femininity is central to *Yield to the Night*; the film would undoubtedly have had a different impact if Mary Hilton had been played by an actress known for her dignity, serenity and lack of affectation, since it is the figure of Dors that gives the characterisation of Mary Hilton its particular impact. Yet at the same time the deconstructive impulse of the film doesn't quite achieve this (or perhaps it achieves it only too well) because it is Dors who constitutes its biggest *problem*. Yet this problem was one expressed almost uniquely by published criticism; it was a

different film for women members of the audience who, with the notable exception of E. Sewell (above), found the possibility of a legitimate identification with Dors both liberating and productive.

In order to discuss this fully, it is necessary to cite critical responses to *Yield to the Night* at some length; this will include extracts from some reviews already mentioned for, almost without exception, critics pass comment on the character of Mary Hilton in so far as she is played by Dors, and specifically in relation to Dors' appearance. It is notable that those reviews that do not make direct reference to her are the ones that appeared in 'serious' film journals - *Films and Filming* and *Sight and Sound* - here, the reviewers concentrate on the film's realism, its treatment of the subject matter and the finesse of the director. It is, therefore, in newspapers (mostly tabloids, but not exclusively) - the arena in which Dors' star persona was constructed and explored - that most attention is given to the debate about Dors as serious actress/glamorous star. It would be mistaken to argue that such attention was unfair or unwarranted; Diana Dors constructed her career through the manipulation of publicity and the deliberate marketing of herself as a 'star'. Nevertheless, the question of whether such treatment was warranted, welcomed or provoked is not the issue here. What is relevant is what sense can be made of how the reviews reflect dominant assumptions concerning femininity, and how they can be seen to support the idea of *Yield to the Night* as a problematic text - the extent of comments about Dors' physical image and the excessive nature of the language used is evidence enough that something other than straightforward film reviewing

is going on. (All emphases in the following extracts are mine.)

"...Continental audiences do not expect such absence of compromise from the British. And they do not expect shapeless prison dress from Miss Dors, whose efforts during the past week have been in the cause of publicity rather than in the reform of British Justice ... I fancy that, as Miss Dors, *blazing in electric blue* came down the staircase and through the foyer to her waiting car, the fashionable evening audience was glad to see her back in her *usual form and shape*." (Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, May 6, 1956.)

"...Miss Dors, with *scrubbed face* and *unperoxided hair*, gives a nicely restrained performance without scratching much deeper than the obvious. But it does prove that *when she scrapes off the glamour* she has more than a wiggle to commend her." (*Sunday Express*, May 17, 1956)

"The film career of Miss Diana Dors has, ironically enough, been handicapped by her possession of *a torso like a figure of eight cut out of eiderdown*...Miss Dors has always had the face of an actress and not a film star. It is not beautiful, hardly even pretty. But that *vanishing chin*, those *caterpillar lips*, the *acid-drop eyes* have about them a *Hogarthian earthiness* which has been only half-concealed under the *glamorous varnish* of the studio make-up men. But *Yield to the Night* allows us to get the lowdown on the pin-up..Diana Dors peels off her *uniform of warpaint* and reveals the *insecure human conscript underneath*..." (Alan Brien, *Evening Standard*, June 14, 1956)

"In her first major dramatic role, the blonde who has been described as our Marilyn Monroe, and whose previous appeal has been optical rather than intellectual, proves she can act...In the condemned cell it is sometimes hard to recognise the new Dors. *Gone is the glamour*, and gowns give ways to prison grey: the *flaxen tresses are dishevelled about a face without make-up and sadly drab*." (Edward Goring, *Daily Mail*, June 15, 1956)

"The *curvaceous* Miss Dors, well in the money these days, cocks an upturned snoot at all those people, including myself, who said she couldn't really act. Diana, the *diaphanous, busty, leggy*, opinionated girl, wipes off the glamour in *Yield to the Night* ...she spends the rest of the film *un-lipsticked* and *un-combed*, with prison overalls in place of the usual low-cut dresses..." (Emery Pearce, *Daily Herald*, June 15, 1956)

"Though I have an eye for a pretty figure I was pleased to see Diana Dors in a film that didn't pose her on a high-diving board, ready to take a header into scented water. Diana, I venture to affirm, is quite an actress. In future you won't have to remember her physical measurements before you decide

she should face a camera fully clothed and get away with it...The crowd will get to see what she's like without a bikini. If you know what I mean." (H. Deans, *Sunday Despatch*, June 17, 1956)

"The film's purpose is in part frustrated by the failure of Miss Diana Dors to touch the more subtle of the emotions. It is legitimate to guess that she has been most carefully directed, and certainly, so far as unselfish effort and physical appearance go, there is no fault to find with her. *Gone is the bright platinum smartness* and in its place there appear the *face and figure of a square, stoutish woman, ravaged of feature, drab and unprepossessing.*" (*Times*, June 18, 1956)

"Miss Diana Dors makes a commendable attempt at the girl under sentence of death...and though she hardly acts at all with her voice she expresses in her newshorn looks a touching vulnerability. Dressed in her finery Miss Dors has previously suggested some *frivolously inflatable beach toy* or...a possible *blonde sister to the pneumatic Michelin Man.* Bereft of gloss, she now reveals a *face that can actually reflect human emotion.*" (*Financial Times*, June 18, 1956)

There is an excessive, almost hysterical edge to these comments that suggests precisely, a breakdown in critical discourse; a moment at which "criticism is incomprehensible" (Clark, 1973: 12). It was these excessive comments, the extraordinarily condescending tone of them, that interested me in trying to understand how *Yield to the Night* could be seen as a film that disrupted the meanings attached to 1950s Affluent femininity - through a femininity that eschewed womanliness and constructed an image that at some level could not be contained or controlled. These comments express a disbelief, an incomprehension at the way that the image Dors presented in this film revealed an aspect of her that had previously been disregarded: that she was more than her star persona, that she was not comprehensible simply as *an image* of a sexy, 'up-front', working-class 'girl' who had found fame and fortune through her 'physical attributes'. Contrasted with the



comments on Celia Johnson in *Brief Encounter* what is striking is the way that these critical responses to *Yield to the Night* focus on how the film 'produces' the 'real' Dors; the character of Mary Hilton is seen to allow access to the 'person' of Dors and beyond, I would suggest, to 'un-mask' Affluent Femininity and through this, to present the 'true' nature of a specifically *British* femininity - primarily, a femininity untainted by the signifiers of Americanisation associated with Affluence. As Lant observes in relation to how the national specificity of *Brief Encounter* was a focus for contemporary critical responses:

"[Critics'] responses confirm the central value of the female image in defining, if not British Cinema, then at least non-Hollywood cinema: national specificity can be established only through difference. As the female image becomes less distinct from the male, in abandoning sequins, satin, strappy gowns, and bare shoulders (those signs of femininity Laura leaves in the railway carriage glass), national specificity is established. Attenuating the visibility of sexual difference builds the possibility of signifying national difference, under these particular historical conditions of cinema." (1991: 189)

It is, then, Mary Hilton in a prison overalls, Dors 'bereft of gloss', that allows for the signification of some sort of 'essential' femininity in mid-1950s Britain, and it is here too that we can see an equivalence, eleven years later, to *Brief Encounter's* presentation of a sort of 'essential Britishness'. It was suggested in Chapter 5 that a particular aspect of the discursive construction of the female cinema audience presented it as 'low-brow', child-like, un-educated and irrational in its responses to film; these attributes were linked to an evocation of particular forms of female pleasure in and identification with the products of Hollywood cinema - the appeal of Americanisation. Furthermore, the female audience was 'written' in terms that

reveal a pathologisation of both the audience and, by extension, of femininity itself: produced through language that evoked bodily functions and biological processes. The comments cited from *Picturegoer* showed how femininity was equated with 'the natural', the libidinal, with narcissistic identificatory processes; contrasting the base and essential nature of the feminine with the sophistication and rationality of the masculine.

In its representation of femininity, in the image of Dors, and through the critical responses to which it gave rise, *Yield to the Night* allows us to see two aspects of the *problem* of 1950s femininity: first, the ideological construction of femininity within patterns of consumption (in its most extreme and 'debasing' manifestation, accompanied by the trappings of Americanisation); second, the tension between this and a notion of a 'natural', essential (British) femininity that is free from artifice and glamour. In *Yield to the Night* these pull against one another in an exaggerated way since it is through the figure of Dors (via other roles and her public life) that a glamorous and available femininity and sexuality is presented (in tension with the image of the character she plays), and it is this in particular that makes her desirable and exciting. Nevertheless, in relation to dominant notions of feminine deviance and conservative attitudes towards sex, the image of Diana Dors is in itself problematic, as this extract from *Picture Post* demonstrates:

"Along with millions of other males, I have for several years been undergoing a love-hate relationship with Miss Diana Dors. Aesthetically, her greedy lower lip revolts me. As a man, it intrigues me. Critically, I do not rate her very high as an actress. Film wise, I can't keep my eyes off her when she smoulders across the screen. For a long, intense chat about the

Illustration 25



Meaning of Things Generally, give me Audrey Hepburn any time. For a good, healthy belly-laugh, I'm a pushover for Di's earthy, milk-bar humour." (18 August, 1956)

Here, the tension between a glamorous (Americanised) femininity and a 'down-to-earth', uncomplicated, 'natural' (British) femininity is almost tangible. Yet the dilemma for reviewers is not to be understood simply with respect to the idea that *Yield to the Night* splits femininity along the axis of glamour versus 'naturalness'. Although this may be the channel through which the contradictions in *Yield to the Night* between the film and its star are expressed and made manifest, the locus of the 'confusion' is, I believe, to be found in Dors' class position and the ways she represented a working-class, Affluent femininity.

It is in this sense that Dors' role in *Yield to the Night* - the character of Mary Hilton read and made sense of through the persona of Diana Dors (exemplified in the critical responses above) - brings into sharp relief the construction of Affluent femininity. However, how the film achieves this is not in its construction of such a femininity, but in the way it *de*-constructs it.

Richard Dyer has argued that 'star images function crucially in relation to contradictions within and between ideologies, which they seek variously to "manage" or resolve'. Alternatively, it may be the case that "stars, far from managing contradictions, either expose them or embody an alternative or oppositional ideological position (itself usually contradictory) to dominant ideology." (1979: 38) This 'subversiveness' can either be contained in the actions

of the stars themselves, or

‘One can think of it simply as a clash of codes...in which the very clash or else the intensity with which the alternative/oppositional code is realised result in “subversion” (or, at any rate, make reading them “subversively” possible or legitimate).’ (ibid.)

I would argue that Diana Dors as a ‘star’, functions in both of these ways; that through the construction of her image, within the discourses of Affluence and attendant notions of femininity which gained currency during the 50s, she can be read as both ‘embodying’ these ideologies and as exposing the contradictions inherent within them. Moreover, it is in *Yield to the Night* that what might be called a ‘clash of codes’ is given full expression.

The extended selection of critical comments cited above has thus far been discussed in relation to how they focus on the disparity between notions of Dors as a ‘star’ and her appearance in the role of Mary Hilton. Once again, a comparison between representations of femininity in Austerity versus Affluence is useful and I would refer back to Sue Aspinall’s presentation of the shift in images of women between the 1940s and 1950s as being between a controlled, discrete middle-class femininity and an active, aspirant working-class femininity with its disregard of ‘class formalities’ (see above, Chapter 4).

Diana Dors was clearly a ‘pouting young blonde’. A product of Rank’s ‘Company of Youth’ (founded in 1946 and closed down just three years later), she was presented as sexually precocious and ambitious: at seven she had written in a school essay that she was going to be a film star and “live in a house complete with

swimming pool and cream telephone" (Dors, 1960: 8), at thirteen she entered a pin-up competition, and so on.<sup>7</sup> A comparison of Dors with, say, Celia Johnson, Anna Neagle, or Margaret Lockwood reveals obvious differences in their images, differences that can be located in terms of class, but also in terms of 'glamour' and self-presentation - dress, habits, behaviours and so on. According to Aspinall (1983: 277), British film actresses of the 1940s were disinterested in the 'glamour' of stardom and the lure of Hollywood. A stark contrast to actresses like Dors or Joan Collins who were

'only too aware of the necessity of pleasing Hollywood ... These pliable lower-middle-class women of the 1950s accepted that they were a commodity to be marketed in a way that the respectable "nice" generation of Lockwood, Calvert, Kerr, Roc and Neagle would not have tolerated.' (1983: 278)

One of the ways the press attempted to deal with Dors' image was to treat her literally as a commodity; an object to be exported and exchanged:

'Even the British...have referred to her as "Britain's best visible export"...and experts say that (Rank) has acquired "the most valuable property in British films today"' (*Time*, 10 October, 1955)

"On the continent she has done for the British what Rolls-Royce, Dunhill, Savile-Row...have done to up-hold the prestige of British workmanship and quality in other fields" (*Daily Mail*, 5 May 1956).

The commodification of Dors was such that critics and commentators 'claimed' her in relation to her national specificity; her appeal and her success were, in these

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<sup>7</sup>The creation of Diana Dors and the various myths that surrounded her are not of central importance here (cf. Geraghty, 1986: 341-5 for a commentary on Dors as star). However, the establishment of Dors' star persona is relevant in that it extends to, and informs the problematic aspects of, *Yield to the Night*.

instances, promoted as uniquely British.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, this emphasis on Dors' Britishness situates the construction of her star persona in a social context that is organised first and foremost around class formations.

It has already been shown that the construction and representation of femininity in Britain in the 40s and 50s was bounded by notions of appropriately expressed class-specific femininities. It is useful to this discussion to consider Dors' role in *Yield to the Night* in relation to her more widely established image as a 'star' and the consequences this has for an understanding of the film's presentations of Affluent femininity. However, it is also the case that the centrality of class in British society and culture as a way of structuring and ordering individuals and groups into particular sets of relations creates problems for an attempt to import Hollywood-based models of the analysis of 'stars' into British Cinema (although it is pertinent that Dors herself constructed her image in accordance with certain Americanised *ideas* such as conspicuous consumption and thus allied herself with American-ness). It has already been suggested that arguments concerning the subversive potential of melodramatic forms are differently emphasised in British films because of the dominance of the realist mode in British Cinema and the themes and subject matter that characterised this; it is also the case that the creation

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<sup>8</sup>This was more pronounced in later writing about Dors. For instance, the *Sunday Express* (17 September, 1978) described her as "something of an institution, like the Albert Hall..." and in *Films and Filming* (January 1963) Dors was characterised as being "as resolutely British as Shrove Tuesday and Brighton Rock."

of 'stars' within British Cinema was subject to the same constraints. Thus, whilst the evocation of Dors as 'star' may be a legitimate way of framing a discussion of the subversive potential in star images, it must also be recognised that there are considerable differences in the clusters of meanings attached to say, Dors and Monroe or Bardot and Loren, that must be recognised and located in the cultural specificity of the construction of such images and personae - this discussion, read in the light of the specific context of 1950s Britain presented earlier, is a consideration of Dors precisely in relation to such a cultural specificity.

Reference has previously been made to the presentation of Dors as glamorous and wealthy and how this could be credited as having an impact on her appeal to female audiences. There is another aspect of Dors' image here which concerns the patterns of her consumption as well as its excess.

"Diana's success has brought her a lavish villa on the Thames (private cinema room with leopardskin chairs, floodlit tennis court, aviary), a powder blue Cadillac...a 50ft. launch (for moonlight glides up the river), and a monoplane for longer trips..." (*Time*, 10 October 1955)

Here we find contact with the *naturally flashy* patterns of consumption signified by Stella in *Turn the Key Softly* and identified there as a consumerism that needed to be educated and refined, and in this catalogue of Dors' possessions we can identify a femininity that has embraced Americanisation with a vengeance (Cadillac, leopardskin covered chairs). Although not directly echoed in *Yield to the Night* in terms of material possessions, Mary Hilton's job and her lifestyle place her, too, in patterns of consumption that suggest her submission to the appeals of the trappings



of American culture and lifestyle. For instance, the store where she works, the drinking club she frequents, her peroxided hair and her carefully applied make-up (neither of which, incidentally, are significantly disordered after she is caught in the rain in the same way that Amy's newly 'modernised' image is destroyed in *Woman in a Dressing Gown*), all present an image of a woman who has successfully domesticated a glossy, flawless and impenetrable glamour associated with American stars (Illustration 25). Here, Dors' image invokes Americanisation and a particularly 'over-produced' femininity that is resonant with those of Hollywood stars. Laura Mulvey writes of this intense, over-emphasised femininity as the

"...sexuality of surface, a sexuality that displaced a deep-seated anxiety about the female body...a bridge between the screen and the marketplace, where woman, the consumer par excellence, also consumes commodities to construct her own sexual surface into an armour of fetishistic defense against the taboos of the feminine upon which patriarchy depends." (1993: 13)

Thus, the character of Mary (and the image of Dors) represents a femininity that was constructed *in* Affluence and Americanisation and that disregarded appropriate or proper womanliness. In this sense, Mary/Dors becomes a signifier for an Affluence that contains within it a sort of 'domesticated Americanisation', resolving contradictions and providing viable points of identification for sections of the female audience. Yet at the same time, these images of femininity embodied the 'threat' to both working- and middle-class values that the mass entertainments industry was seen to represent:

"mass-entertainments...full of a corrupt brightness, of improper appeals and

moral evasions...they tend towards a view of the world in which progress is conceived as a seeking of material possessions, equality as a moral levelling, and freedom as the ground for an endless irresponsible pleasure" (Hoggart, 1958: 340).

This contradictory status is amplified through reviewers' comments about Dors in *Yield to the Night* and in this role it is both Mary Hilton and Diana Dors who are punished for a transgression - Mary's is a moral transgression, Dors' an ideological one.

In a typical passage, Raymond Durgnat comments on the 'phenomenon' of Dors and identifies the source of critical ambiguity towards her:

'...“our Di”, who, almost alone, raised the standard of enjoyable affluence - this cheeky, sexy barmaid-in-sequins personifies the proletarian dream of belonging to the outwardly Americanised, chromium-plated, middle-classes...if an industry ostensibly devoted to glamour and fun hasn't a clue what to make of her, neither had those left-wing critics who delighted in her without ever noticing that she represents just that vulgar and hedonistic relish of affluence which they attributed to the commercial media's corruption of working-class frugality.' (Durgnat, 1970: 55-6.)

As both affluent and working-class she had achieved the 'status through consumption' which was so much a part of Affluence; but this status was firmly grounded in 'the common', 'the vulgar' (cf. *Picture Post* above, 288-9). In other words, her embourgeoisement did not express itself through the preferred channels of the adoption of middle-class values, nor bourgeois 'aesthetic sensibilities'; she did not become *like* Monica in *Turn the Key Softly* - she did not adapt to patterns of consumption that demonstrated the assumption of correct femininity. The slippage between Dors as star and Mary Hilton as character suggests that, in terms of her role in both *Yield to the Night* and in terms of her star persona, Diana Dors did not

manage the fragile and contradictory nature of embourgeoisement or the classless society but embodied the contradictions in both Affluence and attempts to construct an appropriate womanliness.

This notion of the structuring of the Dors image within the framework of class and Affluence, coupled with what could be termed Leavisite notions of 'taste' and 'value', can usefully account for the ways in which elements of the press found her problematic. In relation to *Yield to the Night* this is clearly evident through a recourse to grotesque descriptive tropes which pepper the extracts above and to which I shall now return; it is in this range of critical accounts of the film that the dichotomy between Affluent femininity and a 'pure', essential British femininity is made explicit; "Attenuating the visibility of sexual difference builds the possibility of signifying national difference..." (Lant, 1991: 189).

The reviews of *Yield to the Night* hinge around this notion of the stripping away of the signs of overt and active sexuality. As discussed above, this is related to the cinematic style of the film and was an important factor for female audience members, although they do not express the same sentiments as the critics.

Comments such as those voiced by the *Evening Standard* and *Financial Times* reviewers - 'torso like a figure of eight cut out of eiderdown...vanishing chin...caterpillar lips...' and Dors as suggestive of a 'frivolously inflatable beach toy' - indicate a hostility that can be understood in the same sense as the terms Hoggart used to denounce mass entertainment and its corrupting influence; the

image of Dors as a condensation of 'improper appeals' and 'moral evasions'. Yet at the same time, the very terms used suggest a more deeply rooted fear of an active female sexuality, a sexuality and image moreover, that was enjoyed by Dors herself, as she commented in one contemporary interview:

'...“I might as well cash-in on sex now while I've got it. It can't last forever can it?” and “They want nice girls. I'd hate to be a nice girl, wouldn't you?”’ (*Picture Post*, 22 January, 1955)

If the culture and cinema discussed in this thesis can be recognised as reflective of a rigidly hierarchical class structure that is also characterised by a strong evocation of propriety and decorum, then it is easy to see why a figure such as Dors would have been problematic in terms of her status as a woman who actively constructed and then enjoyed her own image (see for instance, Geraghty: 342-3).

Other elements of the reviews support this, in addition to the proposal that what is at stake here is the nature of Affluent femininity; as Edward Goring of the *Daily Mail* comments, Dors' "previous appeal has been optical rather than intellectual", and H. Deans of the *Sunday Despatch*, "you won't have to remember her physical measurements before you decide she should face a camera fully clothed and get away with it". These comments echo precisely the notion that a femininity constructed in and expressed through reference to the glamorous and spectacular nature of Americanisation - consumption, display, ostentation - is vacuous and artificial, masking and over-shadowing the sober, serious and 'natural' quality of Britishness so perfectly signified by Celia Johnson or Anna Neagle. Goring's reference to Dors' lack of 'intellectual appeal' also highlights and echoes

sentiments expressed in *PFR* 's validation of certain types of cinema; the construction of 'think films' that display 'integrity' and explore 'finer emotional qualities'; it also underscores the differences between audiences' and critics' responses to the film.

For these reviewers what redeems *Yield to the Night* (despite some ambiguity expressed about its ultimate success in transmitting its message) is the representation of a femininity that has been emptied of all signs of otherness or foreignness: 'gone is the glamour'; 'when she scrapes off the glamour'; 'peels off her uniform of warpaint'; 'un-lipsticked and un-combed' and so on. What is revealed through this is an 'insecure human conscript'; 'a face that can actually reflect human emotion'; 'a square, stoutish woman, ravaged of feature, drab and unprepossessing'; and 'a face without make-up and sadly drab...' In rejecting the glamorous femininity that is Diana Dors and Mary Hilton, the critical responses to *Yield to the Night* help to secure it in the dominant realist style with its attendant sincerity and serious purpose; through these comments the power and impact of an Affluent and Americanised femininity is neutralised, placed within a humanist and modernist paradigm. Thus, a problematic image (Diana Dors and/as Mary Hilton) is recuperated into a dominant framework - her image and the meanings that attached to it are taken out of her control, 'made safe' (she is, after all, simply an insecure human), and marginalised as nothing more than an expression of the human condition, a corollary to, and opposite of, masculinity.

This argument does not extend to Diana Dors' star image and persona post-*Yield to the Night* - the meaning of Dors was not so securely fixed in the film that she never escaped from it, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that she was not contained by it, rather she surpassed it, despite the ending of the film. However, as I have posited, the response to this film can be understood as an antagonistic response to the Affluent femininity that Dors signified; the refusal of critical responses to engage with her presentation of Mary, and of herself, within these terms is sanctioned by the way that the film is predicated on the de-construction of the active and glamorous femininity it sets-up; I will now discuss this in more detail as a way of concluding the arguments presented in this chapter.

The critical writing around *Yield to the Night* that has structured this discussion suggests that the film provoked anxieties for a critical audience which read the film from a particular subject position which can be characterised as masculine. This uneasiness has been discussed primarily in relation to how Diana Dors in the role of Mary Hilton evoked a number of themes and elements in contemporary Britain that both personified the production of femininity in Affluence and simultaneously exposed its construction. In doing so this image highlighted the contradictory nature of the construction of femininity in relation to class that was dominant at the time. *Yield to the Night's* conditions and context of production and reception have been discussed in relation to how the film's cinematic style - itself a contradictory and peculiar mixture of realism with expressionistic moments, contained within a 'woman's picture' - somehow allowed for a legitimisation of its 'feminine' subject

matter and the female audience's identification with, and valourisation of, its star.

It is clear from this discussion that *Yield to the Night* offers the possibility for considering the construction of femininity in a particular context from a number of different aspects; at the same time, the above arguments have showed how contradictory elements were collapsed together in the same film. It has been difficult to contain these since they are complex and inter-connected in ways that make discussion of individual elements or themes problematic - for instance, the representation of class-specific femininity in the film is so deeply rooted in extra-textual knowledge of the star persona of the protagonist that it is difficult to discuss its representation without reference to Dors as star; similarly, the presentation of an image of a sexually active woman is informed also by the nature and personality of the film's main character. The following analysis of *Yield to the Night* will approach the central question of how the film constructs and then de-constructs femininity.

Structured around a series of flash-backs that are explained and organised by a first person voice-over, *Yield to the Night* constantly juxtaposes Mary Hilton in her two roles: a character identifiable as aspirant and affluent, sexually active and desiring, modern and independent; and a character made 'neutral' through the removal of adornment and thus the visual signifiers of any overt and easily identifiable class position or sexual activity.<sup>9</sup> This opposition is established in the first two

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sequences of the film (split by the credit-sequence): the murder of Lucy Carpenter, Mary with platinum blonde hair, in stylish and fashionable clothes, high heels; and then to a prison cell and Mary Hilton's first words in the film: 'When will it be?' This pattern is repeated throughout the film, the flash-backs provide some relief from the unremitting examinations and preparations that surround Mary Hilton in the prison, in addition they provide her with an escape of sorts from her confinement; the flashbacks occur at moments of contemplation, triggered by an event in the prison, or as dreams or nightmares. In this way the film explores the character of Mary Hilton: she is split into these two oppositional images and one is held responsible for the actions of the other.<sup>10</sup> The two images of Mary find an equivalence again in the star persona of Diana Dors, and result in similar conclusions apropos the 'true' nature of femininity in the mid-1950s.

'We first met at the Dorchester and she happened to be wearing a pair of old jeans. With some actresses one would have sensed an "act". With Miss Dors the choice of clothes seemed perfectly natural - as though trousers were just what she happened to be wearing at the time we were due to meet.' (*Daily Mail*, May, 1956)

"she swept in, coruscating with purple sequins topped with white fox, and tinkling with the chunkiest jewellery seen outside the Congo." (ibid.)

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<sup>9</sup>In a sense, Mary Hilton ends up in the place from which the characters of *Turn the Key Softly* start; where they assume their identities as women and have to negotiate a new place for themselves within appropriate models of femininity, Mary Hilton begins the film with 'an identity' (albeit an inappropriate one) and is progressively disinvested of this throughout the film.

<sup>10</sup>Although Mary maintains until the end that she does not regret killing Lucy Carpenter and this undermines her characterisation as somehow schizophrenic, it is nevertheless the case that the lifestyle and sexual desire of the pre-murderous Mary is clearly presented as the motivation for her actions and is held responsible for the plight of the woman in prison.



Illustration 26



These extracts hedge round the issue of the contradictory nature of a femininity that is simultaneously structured around 'nature' and 'artifice'; the 'purple sequins' and so on are therefore, characterised by the writer as reflective of 'a highly personal approach to clothes' and more - as

"the spontaneous self-expression of a young woman who was born a little larger than life and has mercifully managed to escape the inhibitions which so often tone down and diminish strong personalities as they grow up."  
(ibid.)

Thus, the contradiction is 'resolved' with reference to an otherness signified through the evocation of the primitive and 'savage' ('the chunkiest jewellery outside the Congo' - a historically resonant image that expresses a particularly difficult moment in British imperial history? or simply a recourse to the invocation of racial otherness as a way of coping with her display of an active female sexuality?), and is contained within the terms of reference to Dors' 'natural' sexual precociousness. This precocity is seen as an expression of something in her which, it is implied, has 'not quite grown up'. Her 'naturalness' is apparent since she wears 'an old pair of jeans', and although she is glamorous and 'artificial' in 'purple sequins' and 'white fox', her artificiality and glamour are no more nor less than 'spontaneous self-expression': as an individual she remains natural 'under the surface', no matter what her outward appearance suggests.

'Natural' sexuality, 'innocence' and 'spontaneity' are crucial to the sex-symbol image that Dors constructed for herself. According to de Beauvoir, the image of the sex-symbol is precisely structured in relation to the presentation of innocence,

Illustration 27



vulnerability and 'natural sexuality'. This constructs an image that is neither adult nor infantile but a combination:

"the child-woman...The adult woman now inhabits the same world as the man, but the child-woman moves in a universe which he cannot enter. The age difference re-establishes between them the distance that seems necessary to desire... Bardot appears as a force of nature, dangerous so long as she remains untamed, but it is up to the male to domesticate her...BB is a lost, pathetic child who needs a guide and protector."(de Beauvoir, 1960: 10-4)

Although an argument for Dors' vulnerability in the same mould as Bardot's or Monroe's would be tenuous, there are parallels in terms of, for instance, failed marriages and financial problems (see Geraghty, 1986: 342-4). More interesting here perhaps is the idea of woman as a 'force of nature'; in possession of a knowingness that calculates the impact of appearance and behaviour, that is tempered by an innocence - a naivety that is necessary, especially in 1950s Britain, for the expression of a raw and vibrant sexuality.

Read in the context of the 1950s and concerted efforts to delve into and 'discover' the mysteries of sexuality, this aspect of what happens to the character of Mary Hilton takes on a slightly different resonance. Many debates of the time had as their object the construction of definitions of sexuality. What emerged was not an acceptance of the diverse nature of sexuality, as suggested by Kinsey's research, but notions of sexuality, constructed through this 'new found knowledge', that reinforced the primary distinction between the 'public' realm of society and work

and the 'private' realm of nature, the individual sexuality etc.<sup>11</sup> Thus,

"Sexuality appears at one and the same time as narrow and limited and as universal and ubiquitous. Its role is both overestimated as the very core of being and underestimated as a merely private reality." (Padgug, 1979: 7)

This idea is closely related to and constitutive of the notion of 'the individual', the humanist concept of 'personhood' that so framed *PFR*'s construction of successful cinema and appropriate audiencehood; an irreducible, coherent and unique entity that remains constant, and provides a framework through which a person's actions and reactions can be understood. It is also relevant to earlier comments about the way that the 'woman's film' legitimates a feminine perspective, or in Doane's words, 'obsessively attempts to trace the contours of female subjectivity and desire within...traditional forms and conventions'. At the same time, the realist mode and the subject matter of *Yield to the Night* imposes the public realm onto this. Given the emphasis on the film's protagonist as 'star', and its concentration on the minutiae of the preparations surrounding Mary Hilton's impending execution - the detailed exploration of a woman on the verge of death - *Yield to the Night* can be understood as a film concerned precisely with the 'contours of female subjectivity'. But this examination leaks from the text itself, focusing on femininity in a more general, social context through the persona of 'Diana Dors'.

The juxtaposition of images of Mary Hilton as glamorous versus unglamorous, is more than a narrative device that attempts to provide an explanation for her actions

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<sup>11</sup>For an analysis of the re-definition and intensification of the boundaries between the public and the private at this time see Hall, 1980b.

and her downfall; it is the comparison of the calculated knowingness of a femininity produced in *Affluence* to the 'natural vulnerability' of 'true femininity'. The critics endorsed and preferred the character's unglamorous aspect, the audience identified this as a way of legitimating pleasure in Dors - the character and the star seem to be inseparable and it is in this light that I offer the remainder of these remarks as pertinent to Mary Hilton as she *stands in for* Diana Dors - these two are not to be compared to one another, but the film does work through their interrelations, including their dissonances.

*Yield to the Night* makes apparent the construction of mid-1950s femininity, and dismantles it to produce a femininity that is in some senses beyond the limits of representation, no longer sustainable by discourse. This is an image that cannot be sustained by fantasy either, for in her 'over-produced', glamorous persona Dors embodies the

'...construction of female glamour as a fantasy space. Its investment in surface is so intense that it seems to suggest that the surface conceals "something else." The question, then, is what this something else might be, and to what extent the surface sheen guards against nameless anxieties associated with the female body outside its glamour mode, which are then repressed, leading to an even more intense reinvestment in the fascination of surface.' (Mulvey, 1993: 13-4)

As has been shown, critics' ever more 'intense reinvestment in the fascination of surface' is apparent in the ways the reviews attempt to maintain both images of Dors but somehow fail; they seem unable to sustain this ever more brittle construction. One of the reasons for this is to be found in the way that *Yield to the Night* 'fails' to manage the contradictions in this particular image of this particular

star.

The structure of the narrative of *Yield to the Night* through flashbacks produces a juxtaposition between two femininities. The visual representation of Mary Hilton carries out first, a detailed investigation of an aspirant, working-class femininity predicated on consumption and display and, secondly, a gradual and relentless de-humanisation of her - she is found wanting within a dominant formulation of morality and appropriate behaviour, and is thus denied existence within it. *Yield to the Night* achieves this both filmically and in narrative terms; each supports and reinforces the other.

Mary Hilton is the focus of *Yield to the Night's* narrative structure; from the opening sequence that establishes the basic storyline, to the final shots in which she walks into the execution chamber, Mary Hilton is the focus of events and is rarely out of frame. However, the incessant focus on her does not place her at the centre of the plot in other ways - she may initiate the primary disruption, but from the moment she discards the empty gun at her feet after shooting Lucy Carpenter, control passes from Mary's hands into the hands of those characters who represent the functions of the State. Her motivation may be privately based - situated in the realm of relationships, emotional trauma, and so on - and the story told may be hers, but because of the nature of her actions, control over future events is wrested from Mary Hilton and placed in the realm of the public. The narrative thrust of the film then is one of investigation - the investigation of a murder through an

examination of the life of the murderer; she may be allowed to tell her story in her own way but the purpose of the story-telling is to place her within a moral and judicial framework that demands to know (not to understand) the details of the crime. The 'social problem' that Lee Thompson refers to above may be that of the rights and wrongs of the capital punishment system, but in *Yield to the Night* the 'other' problem is the rights and wrongs of a 1950s British femininity.

Thus, Mary is constantly subjected to the scrutiny of those in charge of her - the prison governor, warders, doctor, padre - and she is 'public property', in the hands of the State, allowed no privacy. Once in prison - finding escape only in her reveries and dreams - she is refused even the vestiges of self-determination and autonomy: the ability to make decisions about the health of her body; the ability to feed and bathe herself; the privacy of sleep and private contemplation. The cell in which Mary is held is constantly illuminated by electric light (she sleeps with a black cloth across her eyes which evokes a blindfold offered to soon-to-be-executed prisoners) and she is accompanied everywhere by two female warders. These women watch over her; chat and gossip as if she were not there; they bathe her and cut her fingernails (Illustration 26); they express concern that she has a blister on her foot, not because it may be painful but because everything must be accounted for, reported and recorded. In addition to the doctor and the padre the female prison warders are simply functions; they have no history or background, and in this role they cannot represent an alternative, acceptable femininity. The exception to this refusal of alternative femininities in *Yield to the Night* is



MacFarlane (Yvonne Mitchell); the scenes of intimacy between MacFarlane and Mary Hilton become all the more poignant because they are the only scenes in the film that allow for any relationship between women to develop (Illustration 27). Yet whilst MacFarlane may represent a humanitarian aspect of institutional power through a relationship to Hilton that is based on 'genuine' concern and care, and where she is the only other female character in the film that is developed in any depth as a character, the possibility that she represents a potentially appropriate femininity is denied by her history. In one conversation with Mary, she reveals her life - a life of frustration caused by her devotion to her mentally unstable mother - and in doing so, she is characterised in a way that disqualifies her as a model for acceptable femininity: she is 'non-sexual', having 'sacrificed' any chance of marriage to care for her mother but, more damaging, is the inference that, by inheritance, she too is potentially unstable. She cannot 'stand for' an alternative model of femininity because she has no future, no role in a society that places women as wives and mothers above all.

The relationship between MacFarlane and Hilton is therefore structured into a maternal framework; MacFarlane the eternal carer, displacing her own desire for the sake of others, Mary Hilton the eternal child, unable to care for herself. And *Yield to the Night* progressively infantilises Mary Hilton. From the obsessive and anxious way that the film focuses on Mary - through scenes in which her body is ministered to and cared for, the way that she is fussed over and watched, forced to eat her breakfast with spoons rather than a knife and fork - she is structured into

relations of dependence and helplessness that progressively disempower her, de-humanise her and fundamentally undercut the agency and activity she possesses in the flash-back sequences. Mary Hilton is constructed as a child-woman - irrational, lacking in critical judgement, emotional and driven by inexplicable impulses - impelled into disaster by her uncontrollable desire for a man who no longer cares for her, she is a pathetic and spoiled child who needs bringing sharply to her senses before they are lost to her (Illustration 27).

The narrative objectification and regression of Mary Hilton is supported by visual techniques which also function to reduce an independent and desiring woman to a helpless and childlike figure. From the opening sequence onwards, the figure of Mary is fragmented in visual terms, marginalised and de-humanised; constantly shot as though sliced in two by the prison bed, positioned at the edge of the frame, through bars or grilles, her image denied any coherence or autonomy. Through the enforced change of clothes from tight-fitting and revealing outfits that emphasise her breasts and buttocks to shapeless and thick prison issue clothes, the physical appearance of Mary Hilton is de-feminised and made amorphous.

From sleekly groomed and bright platinum blonde hair to an un-tended, almost matted mess that has lost its sheen and is showing black at the roots, her glamorous presence is progressively dismantled - in the numerous sleeping and waking scenes that appear in the film, Mary Hilton resembles nothing more than a scruffy and fearful child. And from a carefully made-up and tended face with emphasised lips

and eyes, Mary Hilton's visage is gradually bleached of all contrast<sup>12</sup> and expression - even her lips are white, their sexually expressive possibilities neutralised, only her dark eyes and eyebrows convey emotion, the anxiety and insecurity of a naughty but rebellious pre-pubescent girl. The use of the close-up shot in *Yield to the Night* is interesting in this respect in that close-up shots of Mary work as a support to the process of revealing the 'real' person behind the glamorous and highly constructed facade. Traditionally, it might be the case that close-ups are used to highlight moments of emotional intensity - joy, ecstasy, terror - and that the framing and lighting of such shots would be composed to show the character in her best light. In *Yield to the Night* however, the close-up is used to de-construct further the previously glamorous appearance of Mary Hilton: she has open-pores, greasy skin and a forehead bathed in sweat.

Rendered unattractive and de-sexualised within the terms of 1950s Affluent femininity, Mary Hilton is thus produced as a featureless, non-subject; the very *thing* that placed her in a powerful and active position in a wider social context, her physical appearance and her sexuality, is neutralised by a series of institutional processes which function to punish her, both for her crime and for her acceptance and personification of the image created by the formation and presentation of a femininity given meaning through consumption and display. Throughout *Yield to*

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<sup>12</sup>It is impossible to speak of the bleaching of colour from the face of Mary Hilton throughout the film since it is black-and-white. However, it is significant that as the film progresses, all colour is drained from her so that even her lips appear to lose any natural 'flesh tones'.

*the Night*, Mary Hilton/Diana Dors gradually disappears, she becomes a fading subject, bereft of signification. In visual as well as critical terms then, this image doesn't survive the onslaught of 'anxieties associated with the female body'.

A great deal of this chapter has concentrated on the cross-overs between Mary Hilton and 'Diana Dors'; this 'confusion' of representation with reality (in so far as a star image can ever be said to be 'real') is not an aberrant reading of *Yield to the Night*; read in relation to both social context and critical and audience responses, the meanings taken from the film are themselves reflective of its difficult position vis-a-vis the interplay of context and the two images of femininity the film presents.

In so far as it is part of a wider study of the re-construction of femininities in post-war Britain, *Yield to the Night* represents a film produced at a junction in a period that no longer knows what to do with "woman"/*woman*<sup>13</sup> and as such it is a productive example of the dilemma of (and for) femininity in the 50s. It has been presented here as a film that demonstrated the limits of attempts to produce an appropriate womanliness. This is due to the way it is unable to contain the contradictions in such a formation. For, despite all that the film does to the figure of Mary Hilton, for the female audience it is the image of Diana Dors that triumphs.

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<sup>13</sup>cf. Teresa de Lauretis, 1984: 5, where she defines these terms as follows: "woman", "a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures", and *woman*, the "other-from man".

If the critical responses to the film reveal a confusion about and hostility towards Dors, the questionnaire responses suggest a reaction that was opposite of this; for female audience members, *Yield to the Night* provides a space of affirmation - Dors emerges from the film intact and indeed enhanced. This highlights both the weaknesses in discursive attempts to construct and delimit femininity and womanliness ('fictional constructs') according to the demands and requirements of a dominant culture, and the distance between these and the subjective experiences and ambitions of 'concrete historical beings' - women in 'the real world'.

It was as if there was something in this film in particular that made possible the treatment both the film and Dors received from reviewers: something 'strange' about it. In his discussion of Hitchcock's *Foreign Correspondent* (1940), Slavoj Žižek outlines a moment in the film when 'strangeness' provokes a disjunction between the ordinary, the everyday, and the extra-ordinary, such that situations and events become imbued with something threatening:

'In pursuit of the kidnappers of a diplomat, the hero finds himself in an idyllic Dutch countryside with fields of tulips and windmills. All of a sudden he notices that one of the mills rotates against the direction of the wind. Here we have the effect of what Lacan calls the *point de capiton* (the quilting point) in its purest: a perfectly "natural" and "familiar" situation is denatured, becomes "uncanny," loaded with horror and threatening possibilities, as soon as we add to it a small supplementary feature, a detail that "does not belong," that sticks out, is "out of place," does not make any sense within the frame of the idyllic scene. The "pure" signifier without signified stirs the germination of a supplementary, metaphorical meaning for all other elements: the same situations, the same events that, till then, have been perceived as perfectly ordinary acquire an air of strangeness.' (1991: 88)

In *Yield to the Night* the 'perfectly natural and familiar' sight of Dors becomes,

precisely, 'denatured' and 'uncanny'. Where this does not happen around a single scene or image, as in Žižek's example, the 'strangeness' of Dors - presented in uncharacteristic guise as an 'ordinary', 'plain' woman - serves to disrupt the ordinariness of *Yield to the Night*, and the image of Dors is transformed into something that 'does not belong', that is 'out of place'. It is here, in the uncanniness of *Yield to the Night* that I believe it is possible to locate the *problem* for the film and for critics; in this film specifically, Dors/Mary presents an image that evokes the peculiarity of the familiar made strange, and an image so troubling and unsettling that it *cannot* be dealt with in terms of a familiar frame of reference. This sense of 'something out of place' in *Yield to the Night* is identifiable precisely, in the figure and image of Dors, in the presentation of a female figure who is divested of the characteristics of 'humanity', a 'pure signifier without a signified'. In *Yield to the Night* I believe it is possible to identify the ways in which a culture both produced and responded to a femininity that was arrived at through the cumulative effects of discursive activity; an activity that produced particular notions of femininity and womanliness which, at a specific historical moment, could no longer sustain the weight of this discourse. It is this that produced the extraordinary response to the film from critics and it is this that this Chapter has been concerned to identify and explore: the crystallisation of the uncanny in the image of Dors in *Yield to the Night*.

## **CONCLUSION: Sex, Class and the Unconscious**

Memory is the past tense of desire (Wilfred Bion, 1967)

In Chapter 1, I suggested that there was a correlation of sorts between John Hill's book *Sex, Class and Realism* and this thesis. This can be partly understood in relation to the following extract from his conclusion, in the argument that meaning is located both in the films and beyond them:

The aim of this study has been to provide an analysis of selected film texts - the British social problem film, the working-class films of the 'new wave' - in relation to the social and economic context of their production...The issues and the topics with which the films dealt, and the attitudes and values they promoted, were not the creations of the cinema alone but were also identified and elaborated upon outside of the cinema (in political speeches and writings, government reports, novels and plays)." (1986: 177-9.)

But there is also another correlation and I would like to begin by clarifying this before I go on to make some final remarks about what I see as the relationship between the 'object' of this study and the 'process' through which it has been approached.

Hill's book provided a place from which to proceed; one or two sentences in particular, from his first chapter pricked my curiosity and, so to speak, upset my preconceptions about what I had (mis)understood as a group of films that were radical and significant statements on 'working-class life' in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. The sentences that 'stuck' from Hill's book were:

'...just as the "female consumer" had served more generally as a metaphor for the 'affluent society', so was it in their imagery of women that the angries were most successful in finding a target for their objections. "What these writers attack", writes D.E. Cooper, "is effeminacy...the sum of those qualities which are supposed traditionally...to exude from the worst in women: pettiness, snobbery, flippancy, voluptuousness, superficiality, materialism.'" (25)

Having been already engaged by *Yield to the Night* (which was first exhibited in the year Hill begins his study of social problem and working-class realist films), having been troubled by it as a film, and confused by the critical responses to it, it seemed that there might be something significant in relation to this film and a broader context of British Cinema. After *Yield to the Night* and *Woman in a Dressing Gown* there was an identifiable change in 'dominant', narrative British realist cinema: women were no longer the focus of films in visual terms, having been displaced from the frame by 'working-class heroes', but they were nevertheless, still very present in them in that they were somehow 'held to blame' for what were, apparently, a range of problems and difficulties with working-class masculinity.<sup>1</sup> It was not that the 'source' of anxieties had shifted (as I mention in

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, in *Room at the Top* (1959), *Look Back in Anger* (1959), *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Kind of Loving* (1962), "By and large, women function either as elusive objects of desire or as threats to the conventional social/sexual order (mainly via adultery) and, either way, must be brought under some kind of male control." (Hill, in Curran and Porter, 1983: 305). In these films women are presented as meretricious and aspirant; and where the 'need' to bring them under 'some kind of male control' is no more nor less apparent than in the films I have discussed, the way in which this is presented is different - focused around a desire to assert masculine power, to re-establish working-class masculinity as 'in control' of its socially and economically aspirant women. What Hill's 1986 book demonstrates is that the 'radical' status of these films, conceals an essentially misogynistic and conservative imperative that is quite different in its expression than the 'subjection to discourse' that I have discussed.



Chapter 1, it has always been apparent that the 'problem', articulated through and focused on women, was partly a problem of masculinity, and of working-classness), nor was it the case that these films from the late-50s and early-60s were inexplicably shifting their attention away from femininity to focus on masculinity. Rather, it seemed that the *arena* in which a range of anxieties about class, sex (and sexual difference) *could be expressed* had shifted - first towards working-class masculinity and then towards youth and race (see Young, 1995 for a study of this).

This shift in focus was, as Hill makes clear (20-7), rooted in a generation of young, male writers who had grown up within Welfarism and who then rejected the recalcitrant class hierarchies that undercut 'classlessness', and so the directions to which those frustrations and angers were directed - 'the establishment' - was not necessarily so surprising. But what was striking was the place of women within these stories - vilified, ridiculed and despised - and the way that the figure of woman carried deep seated anxieties and fears of 'the feminine' as a threat to 'proper' working-class values, in much the same way that the image, presentation and construction of femininity had functioned to hold all these together in previous years.

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Moreover, it is important to recognise that these films were produced within a somewhat different cultural climate than that between the immediate post-war years and the mid-1950s (cf. Hill, 1986, Chapter One: 5-34).

From this different understanding of 'the social problem/working-class realist film' it seemed that to look back, to try to identify how femininity could become marginalised (in visual terms) but still be central (in terms of what it signified - a corruption of 'properness' through its formation in and from Affluence), might bring some sort of understanding about how the image of woman and the idea of femininity, came to be associated so easily with the debasement of 'traditional' working-class values and masculinity. More importantly, this particular purchase on these films might offer a way to argue for what started out as 'a feeling' that the image of Mary Hilton/Diana Dors was significant in this process.

In order to find ways to manage this I have called upon a few key or paradigmatic texts: John Hill's book provided a starting point from which to look backwards as well as a sense of the importance of context and a diversity of sources; Denise Riley's work on post-war pronatalism and John Ellis's essay on 'the quality film', provided clear examples of how Foucault's theories of discourse could produce a rich and illuminating understanding of how a dominant culture expresses itself. Andreas Huyssen's essay, read in relation to a range of feminist theoretical texts, notably Sandra Harding's essay on feminist critiques of science (1990) and Jane Flax's paper on 'Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory' (1990), provided a way of clarifying the construction of the feminine within and in relation to culture. Tim Clark's distinction between 'the audience' and 'the public' was instrumental in providing links between the discursive production of the feminine audience and the eruptions of the unconscious in the critical discourses

surrounding *Yield to the Night*. Teresa de Lauretis's 'three categories' of woman offered a framework within which it was possible to differentiate between ideas of women as each 'objects of desire', 'discursive constructs' and 'concrete historical beings', and sometimes to keep a sense of how images move between them.

Finally, the comments and letters I received from women cinemagoers, gave me much more than expected: a rich sense of the period.

These texts though, have been themselves changed slightly by the process through which this research has been carried out - the approach I have taken to this research has made possible certain insights that would not otherwise have come to light, or would have shown themselves differently. This is a question of methodology and approach - here it has meant that whilst some separation between the different aspects of the research was necessary, it was also very difficult. For instance, the questionnaires and, particularly, the follow-up letters, were constructed from an understanding of the main ideological and cultural themes of the period, but they in turn informed and refined that sense; the selection of films was made from a consideration of context, informed by the questionnaires; the readings of films were informed by critical responses, questionnaire comments and historical and cultural context. This process of reflection and re-consideration, always contained within a materialist framework that recognises the limitations of cultural products provides, I believe, a certain subtlety and richness in this project - this is a result of process as much as it may emanate from the 'research object'.

The question of methodology in this research has not been a question of which single methodology to use (empirical study, textual analysis, social context), but of how to manage a range of methodological approaches since 'answers' are not, it seems, to be found in a singular, unifying framework but in the interrelations *between*, for instance, feminist theory, film studies, cultural studies, critical theory (and psychoanalytic theory).

Finally, I would like to make some remarks about two enduring images of femininity that have been brought sharply into focus by my research for this thesis. I believe that both these images and the framework within which they have been made sense of has revealed significant insights into the construction of femininity and womanliness in a specific historical and cultural context.

First, the *either/or* choice represented by Georgie *or* Amy. Georgie, the 'ordinary' working-class 'career girl' who has invested in Affluence to the extent that she has forfeited a femininity that either retains or displays desire or emotion; *or* Amy, the 'ordinary' working-class 'wife and mother' who cannot buy into Affluence since, on the one hand she lacks the ability to create and maintain control of the private, domestic sphere, whilst on the other hand, she literally has no *sense* of how she should *be* in the public sphere of consumption or how to translate this consumption into appropriate behaviour and presentation. (Amy cannot *perform* femininity). Georgie, consigned to a life of efficient and purposeful aspiration, the consumer citizen who constructs herself *through* the acquisition of commodities, who

*produces* her life (an appropriate lifestyle) through the presentation of 'appropriate objects' (Bowlby, 1985: 28), but who has no real emotional investment in either commodities or lifestyle; they do not signify her desire or her pleasure, rather, they 'speak' her subjectivity. (Georgie is a subject in and of consumerism, hers is a femininity produced by and subsumed under Affluence.) Amy, consigned to a life of inefficient and 'aimless' attempts to conform to an *ideal* of domesticity, to *become* the 'perfect' wife and mother, literally cannot accomplish this. In this sense Amy represents a femininity that is literally uncontainable, a femininity that "signals the precarious grasp the subject has over its identity and bodily boundaries, the ever present possibility of sliding back into the corporeal abyss out of which it was formed" (Grosz in Wright, 1992: 198).<sup>2</sup> The resolution for Amy is

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<sup>2</sup>In trying to find a way to *write* and make a clearer sense of Amy's signification within Affluence, I have found that the notion of 'the abject' comes close to accounting for this sense of 'messiness' signified by the figure of Amy. I have tried to establish an analytical framework that can 'do without' psychoanalytic concepts but, as I shall discuss below, in the process of trying to write both the Introduction and Conclusion to this thesis it has struck me that such an attempt misses something; misses, perhaps, a 'bigger picture'. In Elizabeth Grosz's account of 'Kristevan theory', the following sentence seemed to express clearly the 'problem' with and for Amy: "Abjection is the result of recognising that the body is more than, in excess of, the clean and proper" (1989: 78). It is this sense of a subjectivity that is 'more than', in 'excess of' the attempts of the symbolic to 'sublimate' it (77) that is resonant here. Given that Affluent femininity is constructed around 'properness' it seems that this concept of 'the abject' can provide a way in which to speak of 'Amy's femininity' other than solely in relation to material, economic and ideological conditions. For there is a sense, in *Woman in a Dressing Gown* particularly, that Amy's 'problem' is 'more than' her simply being unable to re-produce herself into an image of appropriate womanliness, but that somehow her struggles and her failure to conform represent a set of impossible demands placed on feminine subjectivity that the culture in the end cannot countenance it.

not one of 'domestic contentment' or discursive containment, neither of these is a viable option for her, because she is 'in excess' of this and, in any case, the stylistic conventions of the film do not offer a space for it. Rather, Amy is to be consigned to invisibility within the domestic realm; she can continue to be disorganised, always on the brink of *either* total transformation into proper or appropriate womanliness, *or* total disintegration into emotional and physical chaos. Either way, she cannot be permitted an existence in the public world where she might be seen or, more importantly, recognised as representing the "personal and cultural horror of the subject's (and culture's) finitude and material limits" (Grosz, 1989: 77).

The second image that resonates throughout this thesis is the 'strangeness' of Dors as Mary Hilton. I believe that this image offers a way of *seeing* the dissolution of Affluent femininity, and more. This is an image made sense of in relation to the peculiarities of the film, at a particular historical moment, in a particular context. This image on some level *exposed* the nature (and sources) of its own construction and in doing so, confronted a dominant culture (represented by the critics) with the *realisation* of this - the discomfort in critical discourse about the film attests to the problematic nature of it. As such, *Yield to the Night* contributed to a shift: a change of the sites (bodies, arenas, themes) on which the fears and anxieties of the dominant culture could be expressed - these were not 'different' anxieties, but the same ones given a different form of expression.

In the immediate post-war period Britain as 'a society' and as 'a culture' attempted

to confront and manage a range of 'problems': women's changed roles; a fractured and dislocated post-war masculinity; the re-negotiation of its changed status in the world; changes in society due to the disruption of traditional class hierarchies. As I have shown, these struggles were played out in part through attempts to construct a dominant, preferred, appropriate femininity. In turn, this was translated into dominant cinema through particular images of woman. In *Yield to the Night* the construction of femininity in relation to the demands of Affluence (glamour, display and consumption) had 'gone too far', it had traversed the boundaries of propriety that were so dependent upon accompanying concepts of class and nation.

In this film we see the presentation of a femininity that is constructed in Affluence, but is in excess of it. The juxtaposition of images in *Yield to the Night* - of Mary Hilton, who is punished, and Diana Dors, who is somehow transcendent - evoked the tensions and contradictions in this representation of femininity; these proved impossible to contain, either in the film itself or in critical discourse that surrounded it. At the end of Chapter 6, I invoked the concept of 'the uncanny' to try to shed light on why *Yield to the Night* provoked the critical responses it did, and this can now bear some amplification.

In the first Chapter of this thesis, I discussed Jackie Stacey's use of the term 'iconic memory' to try to establish the nature of comments from the questionnaire which evoked a specific, de-contextualised, but resonant image. These comments were most strikingly prevalent in relation to only two films: *Woman in a Dressing Gown*

and *Yield to the Night*. When thinking about this whilst writing Chapters 1 and 6, in relation to the analysis of Dors' image offered above, two slightly differently inflected 'explanations' for the focus on a 'frozen moment' sprung to mind. First, that written about by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", (second that suggested by Mulvey's 1993 essay on fetishism):

"The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation." (cited from Penley (ed.), 1988: 62)

There are, nevertheless, elements in this that are troubled by *Yield to the Night*: by the visual style of the film (oppressive and fragmented); the particular mode of the film (a mixture of 'social realism' and 'woman's picture'); the treatment of the 'woman' in the film (de-glamorised, 'made ugly' and 'made strange'); and importantly if not centrally (since the above formulation does not look 'outside' of the text in this way), the way the film was written about at the time (the preoccupation with Dors' appearance and the uneasiness about this). These elements mitigate against arguments about the particular way that the image of woman 'freezes the flow' - for whilst Dors was a British 'sex symbol', her image never had the allure of the American stars: Hollywood films were, by the early- to mid-1950s, more popular among the audience I have been discussing and the comments cited in Chapter 6 suggest that Dors was never glamorous or 'glossy' enough not to be seen as 'Our Di'. This may not have been the case for critics, although their comments do suggest that Dors always presented them with some difficulty, and discomfort.



In a later essay cited in Chapter 6, Mulvey writes of the fetishised image of woman as an image constructed as 'surface'.

'Just as an elaborate and highly artificial, dressed-up, made-up, appearance envelopes the movie star in "surface", so does her surface supply a glossy front for the cinema, holding the eye in fascinated distraction away from its mechanics of production. This fragile carapace shares the phantasmatic space of the fetish itself, masking the site of the wound, covering lack with beauty.' (1993: 12)

Although perhaps never an un-fractured 'carapace', Diana Dors' image was precisely one that shielded her in a 'glossy' surface, created through her consumption of an Americanised (but domesticated), Affluence. In this way she held together two fragile concepts and somehow legitimated them, while simultaneously standing in for them - as a signifier of both Affluence and Americanisation, her presentation as 'Britain's best export' secured the connection (and managed the tensions) between these two. Yet still, there is something 'off' here, because Dors still doesn't quite convince as 'a star'.

It is Mulvey's exposition of the connections between Marxist and Freudian theories of fetishism that is most useful. In the context of Affluence and the particular Americanisation Dors represented; with reference to the concept of a 'sexuality of surface'; and (because the critical voice was always there and always revealed more than it said about how the film might be viewed from a 'preferred' reading position), in the light of the critical discourse around Dors in *Yield to the Night*, the 'problem' with this image can be clarified.

"For Freud, the body that is the source of fetishism is the mother's body, uncanny and archaic. For Marx, the source of fetishism is in the erasure of

the worker's labor as value. Both become the unspeakable, and the unrepresentable, in commodity culture. Repression of the mother's body, repression of labor power as a source of value. These two themes run, respectively, through the Marxist and Freudian concepts of fetishism, concealing (in image) structures of sexual difference and value that, although not themselves structurally linked, reinforce each other through topographies and displacements linking the erotic spectacle of the feminine to the eroticized spectacle of the commodity." (19)

These two concepts allow for the argument that *this* film significantly disrupted, or exposed, a specific, conventional representation of a particular construction of femininity. In a culture that had been attempting to reconstruct itself since the end of the war at least, and that was at the beginnings of a shift from a production to a consumption-based economy, and in an image that was constructed around the surface and glamour of an Americanised Affluence we find the 'problem' that *Yield to the Night* represented, and thus the 'problem' for femininity and womanliness. Confronted with the tensions and contradictions in Affluent femininity, dominant critical discourse was also confronted with the uncanny, the abject - the realisation that, after all, this thing in which so much had been invested was no more than an attempt to conceal and deny 'the feminine' (corporeality and mortality).

I would argue, though, that the women who watched the film did not have the same problems with it: they too may write about Dors' appearance, may 'fall back into' a familiar 'reinvestment in surface' (Mulvey, 1993: 14), but they do not reveal the same reactions as the critical discourse (fear, anxiety, incomprehension). Rather, they 'knew all along' that this was an artificial image, a construction, but they

enjoyed it, they found it desirable and exciting, unlike the critics who were always unsure what to make of Dors. I do not mean by this that these female viewers were 'unaffected' by the image, that they were somehow 'heroically' able to transcend 'dominant ideology'. Rather, that the combination of the fractures in Dors' armour (which resided in her class position), and these women's own lived experiences, produced for them a different space from which to view the film. Thus, she may have been 'imperfect', but she still 'held' a gloss of the 'specialness' that is associated with 'stars': "we all wished we could be as sexy" (J. Goodison); "with or without her mink bikini on the beach at Cannes this vibrant lady would still have become popular." (E. Flynn); "she was so down to earth but still very much the star as the same time" (Z. Wilson).

It is my belief that this can only be comprehended in the light of the arguments made above; in retrospect it seems like a small thing with which to have been so pre-occupied, and it is also rather surprising. There is a sense in which I have tried hard throughout this project to deny the presence of the unconscious, to refuse a psychoanalytic framework in favour of a materialist, historical narrative. It seems that in order to be able, finally, to pin-down the point, I cannot do without it; that issues of desire, fear, anxiety - the things that haunt the constructions that have been presented and explored - require the insights offered by psychoanalysis and open on to another project.

If there has been an implicit (psychoanalytic) theoretical text informing the

analysis in this thesis (and I can only say this now, looking back) it became evident to me in one short extract from Mulvey's 1993 essay. In relation to the specificities of this project - the way that it has aimed to maintain a sense of context and has addressed the question of the consumption of a particular image always in relation to the contexts from which it was produced - certain psychoanalytic strategies have seemed unsatisfactory. The cultural specificities of texts do make a difference to how they 'measure up to' Hollywood. However, as I have argued, there are certain understandings that are only possible through those strategies. The 'combining' of Freudian and Marxist concepts of fetishism suggests the possibility for a project that can address these vital issues and still maintain a sense of specificity and historicity that has been lacking in approaches to film that focus on text solely. Laura Mulvey clarifies this when she proposes a way of understanding cinema that moves away from the impasse of postmodern self-referentiality and intertextual reference:

"To look back at the aesthetics of disavowal in Hollywood cinema is, still, an attempt to rearticulate those black holes of political repression, class, and woman in the symbolic order. But it is also an attempt to return to a consideration of the relationship between cause and effect in the social imaginary at a time when the relationship between representation and historical events is becoming increasingly dislocated. Spectacle proliferates in contemporary capitalist communication systems. At the same time, the reality of history in the form of war, starvation, poverty, disease and racism...demands analysis with an urgency that contemporary theory cannot ignore." (20)

If the unconscious has only just 'appeared', at the end of this thesis, then this, in itself, is not without significance. At the same time, it has been 'apparent' throughout: in the reviews of *Yield to the Night*; in the critical projection of the

female audience; in post-war pronatalism; in the images of women in films; in the construction of femininity through consumerism; and in the questionnaire comments and letters. This, I believe, has allowed me to make a slightly different sense of these images - one arrived at through the discussion of a range of texts in relation to the production of particular meanings and the consumption of diverse, but specific, meanings, each of which have their bases in the material conditions of the period.

## APPENDIX

The following letter was printed in a range of local newspapers throughout Britain (see below) and in the *TV Times* of June 3-9, 1989.

A total of 350 completed questionnaires were received from women cinema-goers and a number of these were approached for further information.

Were you a keen cinema-goer during the late Forties and through the Fifties. I am interested in hearing from women film fans about their memories and experiences during this period. If you would be prepared to answer a questionnaire, please write to me at the address below.

Local Newspapers:

Aberdeen, *Evening Express*  
 Bath and West *Evening Chronicle*  
 Bournemouth, *Evening Echo*  
 Dundee, *Weekly News*  
 East Anglian *Daily Times*  
 Gloucester, *The Citizen*  
 Kent *Messenger*  
 Manchester, *Evening News*  
 Portsmouth, *The News*  
 Reading *Chronicle*

### BRITISH FILM HISTORY: AUDIENCE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Date of birth:

Between 1945 and 1958, in which town(s) or district(s) did you live, and did you live with your parents, with your spouse or on your own?

If you worked during the war, which job(s) did you do? If you did not work, which job(s) did your mother, father or spouse do?

If you married either during the war or in the years immediately following, when did you get married, and which job(s), if any, did you or your spouse do?

Do you remember when you, or your mother if you lived in your parent's house, got your first refrigerator, vacuum cleaner or washing machine during the period 1945-1958?

On average, how many times a week or month did you visit the cinema?

How many cinemas were within easy reach of your home?

Did you visit only local cinemas or would you travel if necessary?

Generally, would you say that your visits to the cinema were prompted by your wish to see specific films, or was a visit to the cinema more of an outing or social event?

When you went to the cinema, did you usually go with one or more girl-friend(s)? If you did, did you talk about the films afterwards, and if so, what did you mostly comment on?

How did you choose which films to see? Did it depend on which cinema was showing particular films? Or on which star(s) were in it? Were you influenced by reading film reviews?

Which, if any, film magazines did you read? Or, if you read film reviews in the newspapers, which newspaper(s) did you look at?

If you read the film reviews in the national newspapers, did you have any favourite reviewers?

Did you prefer British or American films?

What did you think were the main differences between British and American films?

Were there any kinds of films Britain made particularly well? Did you have a favourite type of film? For instance, did you prefer to see costume dramas, romances, comedies, war films, musicals, horror films, family dramas or westerns? Which of these did you dislike or avoid?

When did you or your family buy your first television set? Did getting or watching television affect your cinema going?

Specific films

Below is a list of films in which I am particularly interested. Could you please say whether you saw any of these, if you liked them, what it was about them you liked, or did not like, along with any other memories or comments you may have about them. The films are listed in order of their date of release.

*Brief Encounter* (1945)

*The Wicked Lady* (1945)

*They Were Sisters* (1945)

*Pink String and Sealing Wax* (1945)

*Perfect Strangers* (1945)

*The Seventh Veil* (1945)

*I Know Where I'm Going* (1945)

*Caravan* (1946)

*Piccadilly Incident* (1946)

*The Loves of Joanna Godden* (1947)

*It Always Rains on Sunday* (1947)

*Good Time Girl* (1947)

*Black Narcissus* (1947)

*A Boy, A Girl and a Bike* (1948)

*Here Come the Huggetts* (1948)

*Dance Hall* (1950)

*Gone to Earth* (1950)

*Madeleine* (1950)

*Turn the Key Softly* (1953)



*The Weak and the Wicked* (1953)

*A Kid for Two Farthings* (1955)

*Yield to the Night* (1956)

*A Town Like Alice* (1956)

*The Feminine Touch* (1956)

*Woman in a Dressing Gown* (1957)

Obviously my list leaves out a lot of important and successful films from the period 1945 to 1958. If there are any other British films you remember particularly well from the period, please list them below, along with any comments you may have about them. I am interested in films from the period which were concerned, above all, with the lives and experiences of women.

#### Specific stars

Below are the names of some women stars from the period. I'd like to know your opinions about them and your memories of them, along with any films you especially remember them appearing in. Also, I'd be interested to know what you thought it was about them that made them stars; for instance was it their film roles or was it the newspaper or magazine publicity about them, or did both of these contribute to their being thought of as stars?

Diana Dors

Jean Kent

Deborah Kerr

Margaret Lockwood

Yvonne Mitchell

Anna Neagle

Patricia Roc

Googie Withers

Celia Johnson

Joan Collins

Ann Todd

Again, this is only a selective list. Please mention below and overleaf any other female performers from British films of the period who you particularly remember, or who you particularly liked.

## SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

This select filmography lists chronologically those films discussed in the text. Where appropriate, I have included selected comments from contemporary reviews and the questionnaire.

### Abbreviations

cert. - certificate	sc. - script
dist. - distributor	p.c. - production company
p. - producer	d. - director

### BRIEF ENCOUNTER (1945)

Cert. - A; dist. - Eagle Lion; p.c. - Independent Producers/Cineguild; p. - Anthony Havelock-Allen, Ronald Neame; d. - David Lean; sc. - David Lean, Ronald Neame; 85 minutes.

Celia Johnson (*Laura Jeesson*), Trevor Howard (*Alec Harvey*), Stanley Holloway (*Albert Godby*), Joyce Carey (*Myrtle Bagot*), Cyril Raymond (*Fred Jeesson*), Everley Gregg (*Dolly Messiter*), Valentine Dyll (*Stephen Lynn*).

"...Love in the suburbs is an endlessly and treacherously attractive theme to novelists, playwrights and film-makers; they have attacked it whimsically, patronisingly, grimly, comically, but seldom with the sincerity of *Brief Encounter*...How simple, commonplace, uncomfortably true and fascinating is this story of not-so-young, not-so-illicit love between two respectably married and nice people conducted furtively and unhappily and exultantly in Kardomah cafés and railway buffets and super cinemas until lies and small deceits so tarnish their joy that they tear themselves asunder.

Much of the power of the love passages is due to the acting of Celia Johnson, who, without manufactured glamour or conventional good looks, magnificently portrays the wife and mother meeting passion for the first time; who wants to die because of it and goes back to her husband...knowing that this golden brief encounter will die in her memory. Trevor Howard as the lover, more than good, is outshone by such a

performance.

Polished as is this film, its strength does not lie in movie technique...so much as in the tight realism of its detail which enlarges the one-act Coward play from which it was taken without loss of flavour or increase of volume."

Richard Winnington, *News Chronicle*, November 24, 1945.

"Although...the too English 'voices' in such films tended to spoil them for me this film transcended that with its exceptional quality and superb acting." (P. Burgess)

'...It seemed that "they" were using real ordinary people in real ordinary settings for the first time. Celia Johnson's husband was an awful stick, Trevor Howard so attractive, Valentine Dyall really horrible. We all felt she did the right thing - but how sad.' (R. Scott)

"...Celia Johnson came across as ordinary - not a glamorous Rita Hayworth type. Therefore, there was hope for all the ordinary girls like us - for romance to be round the corner." (E. Sewell)

## DANCE HALL (1950)

cert. - A; dist. - General Film Distributors; p.c. - Ealing; p. - Michael Balcon; d. - Charles Crichton; sc. - E.V.H. Emmett, Alexander Mackendrick, Diana Morgan; 80 minutes.

Natasha Parry (*Eve*), Jane Hylton (*Mary*), Diana Dors (*Carole*), Petula Clark (*Georgie*), Donald Houston (*Phil*), Bonar Colleano (*Alec*), Douglas Barr (*Peter*).

"Another slice of life as it is lived from Ealing Studios...it (still) has the virtue of a well-observed London background and is peppered with pungent little commentaries upon the loves, hates and habits of the average young Londoner. The hero and heroine combined is the local Palais de Danse where a proportion of the neighbourhood youth congregates: some to find companionship, some to forget sordid home conditions, some to relax in congenial surroundings and - some to dance.

The four girls with whom we are concerned work in a factory during the day. At night they dream their own special dreams at the Palais.

Georgie wants to become a great dancer....Carole and Mary want to have a good time, preferably in male company.

Eve isn't sure what she wants, and after marrying steady Phil on the rebound from a hectic affair with the local wolf, she has to suffer through a series of misunderstandings before both she and Phil can adjust themselves contentedly to

married life.

The four capable young stars...act exceedingly well...Against this formidable array of female talent, the young men concerned seem less at ease..."

*Picturegoer*, July 8, 1950.

"Enjoyed it, because of [the] setting - we were dancing when we weren't at the pictures." (A. Coulton)

"What I call an 'identity' movie. If I couldn't identify with the heroine I lost interest." (P. Williams)

"Remember this film well. Petula Clark's Mum making her dress - and she not wearing it - I thought it was awful to be such a snob." (M. York)

### **TURN THE KEY SOFTLY (1953)**

cert. - A; dist. - General Film Distributors; p.c. - Chiltern; p. - Maurice Cowan; d. - Jack Lee; sc. - John Brophy, Maurice Cowan; 90 minutes.

Yvonne Mitchell (*Monica*), Joan Collins (*Stella*), Kathleen Harrison (*Mrs. Quilliam*), Terence Morgan (*David*).

"This modest British melodrama makes no great claims for itself but it rattles along with all the self-confidence of a driver's making speed on a familiar by-pass. It is made with two eyes on the popular box office and none on critical acclaim, and it isn't ashamed to parade well-tried favourites in situation and character..."

...there is quite an interesting situation of the three women who are tipped out of Holloway Jail early one morning and who make a date to meet in town that night. One is a tart; tight of skirt and loose of eye; the second is an elderly drab who loves her dog and likes stealing things; the third is a young woman of education. Her tragedy is that she didn't know her lover was a burglar and that he would be cad enough to let her do a little stretch.

...The tart yields to temptation, but finally returns to Canonbury and her bus conductor. Sad things happen to the drab and her dog; but the main melodrama ends with a chase over the roof-tops after the classy young woman has been indiscreet enough to start things all over with her cat burglar.

All these, of course are familiar figures, played with differing degrees of skill. Kathleen Harrison's be-toqued charlady is about as familiar as Britannia in the back of a penny, and about as moving. But poor Joan Collins is scarcely able to sit down in the slinky stuff provided her: a sad business!

However, the picture gets a good lusty kick into life from the really sensitive acting

of Yvonne Mitchell...When she is on parade the picture really convinces..."  
*Picturegoer*, May 23, 1953.

'Much too many stereotypes of women "offenders" even though our own favourites Yvonne Mitchell and Kathleen Harrison did as well as possible with a poor script. The importance of the male characters seemed unbelievable when they were such incredible drips.' (K. Heenan)

"This was made memorable for me by the acting of Yvonne Mitchell, who came across as such a warm personality and I never cease to cry my eyes out when Kathleen Harrison's character gets killed." (M. Porteus)

#### **YIELD TO THE NIGHT (1956)**

cert. - X; dist. - Associated British-Pathe; p.c. - Associated British; p. - Kenneth Harper; d. - Jack Lee Thompson; sc. - John Cresswell, Joan Henry

Diana Dors (*Mary Hilton*); Yvonne Mitchell (*Macfarlane*); Michael Craig (*Jim Lancaster*).

#### **WOMAN IN A DRESSING GOWN (1957)**

cert. - A; dist. - Associated British-Pathe; p.c. - Godwin-Willis-Lee Thompson Production; p. - Frank Godwin, Jack Lee Thompson; d. - Jack Lee Thompson; sc. - Ted Willis; 94 minutes.

Yvonne Mitchell (*Amy*), Anthony Quayle (*Jim*), Sylvia Syms (*Georgie*), Andrew Ray (*Brian*).

"...In an effort to escape the restrictive conventions of the television play, the director, J. Lee Thompson, has employed a very mobile shooting style, so that the camera is forever roaming in and around the (determinedly) cluttered flat, observing the characters from a variety of oblique angles...The film has attempted, courageously, to analyse the emotions of a pitifully eccentric character: Amy is shown as a woman striving to save a marriage threatened by her inability to come to terms with her daily life...her actions...following her husband's decision to seek a divorce, painfully reflect an almost pathological determination to retrieve the situation in the only way she understands. When, in consequence, the audience is invited to laugh at her vain attempts to prettify herself and, later, to watch her

getting ludicrously drunk, it seems to me that the handling, lacking a sufficiently positive attitude towards the character, prejudices and weakens the pathetic implications of what follows.

...Despite the over-facile resolution of the last scene, one's final impression is of an emotional drama of considerable intensity; and the film's very willingness to concern itself with such an uncompromising subject gives it a special prominence in the contemporary British cinema. Like *Brief Encounter*, it raises some controversial moral issues...even though realism is sometimes obscured in a veil of artifice." (*Sight and Sound*, Volume 27, Number 2, Autumn 1957.)

"A good film of its time with an excellent central performance and a good insight into the character of the woman portrayed." (C. Cusack)

"This film did influence me - as never after seeing it did I get up without dressing - as I never forgot what a slob she was - though strangely I can't remember the actress." (A. Green)

"Felt sorry for Yvonne Mitchell, especially after getting her hair done and then it rained, but felt exasperated with her absent-mindedness. Couldn't believe anyone could live like that." (V. Harden)

"Thought it great. Where I felt most for Yvonne Mitchell was when she made a big effort to tidy herself up and went and had her hair done. It poured with rain and ruined everything." (R. Scott)

"Absolutely superb. Remember being close to tears when Yvonne Mitchell got soaked in the rain after having her hair set." (J. Veal)

"I can remember the star being constantly dressed in her dressing gown and as in a lot of the films at the time it showed the sheer drudgery and hopelessness of women's lives." (J. Mason)

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## II - Periodicals and Magazines

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**part a)** covers articles that relate to social history, film criticism or appreciation, writings on the female audience;

**part b)** refers to additional material pertinent to the discussion of Diana Dors and *Yield to the Night*.

### Part a)

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This select list includes all essays cited in the above text plus those that were particularly relevant to discussion of the notion of the 'Quality Film' and the female audience.

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See also:

Houston, Penelope's review of the collected Penguin Film Review, in *Sight and Sound*, Volume 47, Number 2, Spring 1978: 128.

### ***The Picturegoer***

The following articles were relevant to the issue of the female audience, plus other areas, such as the climate of critical opinion on British Cinema versus Hollywood - as the titles of the articles suggest, by 1954 focus had shifted from British films to Hollywood and thus there are fewer extracts from the later editions of the magazine. The articles below are listed chronologically and include those articles and essays already cited in the above text.

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- Editorial: "Let's Face 1948 with a Smile!", January 3, 1948.  
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- Box, Sydney: "I Challenge the Critics", January 1, 1949.  
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